fantastic

NOVEMBER-DECEMBER, 1953

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DRAMATIC FANTASY FICTION

By

FRANK M. ROBINSON

ROBERT SHECKLEY

ROG PHILLIPS

ROBERT BLOCH

RALPH ROBIN

A PORTFOLIO

by Gyula Zilzer

NEVER MIND A MARTIAN!

A New "Reggie" Story by William P. McGivern

GYULA ZILZER

•

a portfolio

Zilzy

Critics have maintained that the work of Gyula Zilzer gives stark testimony of this sensitive artist's grim experiences under the Hitler tyranny. Translated into fantasy, we find in his drawings the reflection of Nazi horror and brutality. Zilzer himself suffered greatly as a victim of fascist persecution. He escaped after a month-long trip in a freight wagon loaded with furniture where he hid in a roll-top desk and almost starved to death. His interpretations have been compared with those of Heinrich Kley, Daumier, and the peerless Gustave Dore. The portfolio is continued on page 70.

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Let's do it for love

BY ROBERT BLOCH

Joe Stevens, an inquisitive chemist, was not satisfied with partial success. His spot-remover took soup off your vest and also, the spots off a leopard. His hair-restorer sent billiard balls to the barber shop. But it seemed that no one wanted hairy billiard balls or spotless leopards. So, one day Joe said to himself: How nice it would be if everybody loved everybody else! No more war. No more hate. Joe went to work, bent upon spreading love throughout the world. And did the world appreciate it? Oh, brother!

SOMETIMES they come crawling out of the woodwork. Sometimes they wear Napolean hats and ride in on invisible white horses. Sometimes they're equipped complete with little green men who keep pulling your socks down when they're not looking.

But this one was different. He looked completely normal. I guessed his age at thirty, his weight at about 160, stripped. Only he wasn't stripped. He was wearing the kind of blue suit that this kind of guy always wears whenever he takes his wife along with him to pick out a gray one.

He had brown hair, rimless glasses, and one of those sincere faces you usually see painted on expensive Mamma dolls. Oh yes, he had a name, too — Joe Stevens. Nothing alarming about any of these things, nothing to make me think that he was a fugitive from the laughing academy.

But it was what he said that set me off higher than a rocket to the moon.

"Mr. Mortimer, you're a public relations man," he yacked.

"What kind of a job can you do to promote love?"

I opened my mouth, but for a minute nothing came out. And when nothing comes out of my mouth for a whole minute, I get worried. Finally I reached inside and dragged out a few words.

"Love?" I said. "You mean, boy-meets-girl kind of love?"

"Not exactly. Perhaps I'd better explain."

"Sit down," I suggested. He picked out a chair, which wasn't too difficult, seeing as how I only have one chair in my office. And then it started.

When it finished, about fifteen minutes later, I was in full possession of the following facts, any or all of which I would gladly have traded for a two-cent stamp.

Joseph Stevens, my visitor, was a chemist employed by the Wagtail Dog Biscuit Company, Inc., of this city. Married, and the father of two children, he was wont to slip down into the basement of his modest little mortgage-covered cottage during the evening and perform experiments.

At a time when all decent, respectable Godfrey-fearing citizens are usually huddled around their TV sets, Joe Stevens would be found somewhere behind the furnace, either working out or testing a chemical formula he had invented.

"I thought if I sort of puttered around long enough," he explained, in his erudite, scientific way, "I might hit on something that would make me some money. I'd be just as happy to do it for the fun of experimenting but Dorothy — that's my wife — seems to prefer money."

I nodded.

"You do understand," said Stevens. "I take it you're married, too?"

"Yes. I understand perfectly," I told him. "And that is one of the reasons I very definitely am *not* married."

"Oh. Well, anyway, I perfected quite a few compounds during the last few years of work. I rigged up a very complete little laboratory in the cellar, and managed to perfect a number of products. But none of them, so far, have appealed to any manufacturer."

"Just what did you come up with?"

"Well, for example, there was my spot remover. It looked to me like a sure-fire proposition."

"But there are plenty of spot removers on the market right now, aren't there?"

"Not like mine. This was no ordinary naphtha compound. My Spot Remover would actually remove any spot. I thought it might be kind of dramatic to hold a demonstration for some possible buyers, so I took a bottle of the stuff out to the Zoo and tossed some on a leopard. Sure enough, it worked."

"You took the spots right off a leopard?"

"Absolutely. But all that happened was the zoo officials wanted to sue me for damaging their property — because without spots their leopard looked like a common mountain lion. My buyers got scared, and Dorothy made me give up the idea. I haven't even tried to use that Spot Remover again, except the time I put some on my youngest child when she had the measles."

"Is that all you perfected?"

"No. The next thing was a headache powder. That really worked, too. But the trouble was, most people would rather have a headache than sprinkle this powder on their heads."

Right at this point I could have used a little of the stuff myself. But I determined to carry on to the bitter end. "What else did you invent?"

"Oh, plenty of things. Like my hair restorer. It actually would grow hair on a billiard ball. But then I found out that nobody wants to buy billard balls with hair growing on them."

"Life is cruel," I told him. "But when do we get to the love part?"

"Only after about two years more of compounding and mixing and stirring and blending. But the important thing is, once I got the basic concept, I worked night and day, every weekend and holiday, to concoct this formula. And finally, I got it. This isn't a fluke — I tell you, it's going to revolutionize the world!"

"But what is it, exactly? What does it do?"

"It's simply a glandular stimulant which produces an endocrinological readjustment of the metabolic factors affecting personality mutation, thus increasing normal empathy."

"There's just one little point that bothers me."

"Namely?"

"What does it mean?"

"It means I have produced a chemical compound that makes people love one another. Simple, isn't it?"

"You are — I mean, it is," I gulped. "But aren't there already such chemicals in use? Regular aphrodisiacs?"

"That's just the point. My concoction is *not* an aphrodisiac. It does not stimulate sexual activity or arouse the senses."

"Too bad," I sighed. "I was kind of thinking of a big advertising and promotion campaign, maybe with a picture of some guy holding a violin and smooching some broad who's playing the piano — like a perfume, see?" And then we —"

"This is not a perfume, Mr. Mortimer. It can be taken orally, by injection, or direct cutaneous application."

"Watch your language, son."

"I mean, it can be applied to the surface of the skin and the pores will absorb it."

"Like a beauty cream?"

"No. It doesn't change the appearance. But it does alter behavior patterns. It eliminates hatred, prejudice, dislike, antipathy. People exposed to this potion feel nothing but pure affection for others — all others."

"Now, wait a minute! You mean to tell me you've invented something that will actually win friends and influence people? What about hangovers?"

"There is no hangover, as you call it, Mr. Mortimer. Depending on the amount administered and the method of absorption, the effects of this formula vary from a few hours' duration to lifetime permanency."

"You take enough, the right way, and you love everybody the rest of your life?"

"Exactly!"

"Even neighbors with loud radios, and guys who try to pass your car on the right, and income tax collectors?"

"Certainly."

"This I've got to be convinced of."

For a moment I stared at the floor, trying to find the two pieces of the infinitive I'd just split. Also, to be perfectly frank, I was also looking for a way to get rid of Mr. Stevens. A good, fast way, because I had done business with screwballs before and found it wise to get rid of them before they started to bounce.

"I'm willing to convince you," Mr. Stevens was saying, "if you agree to take me on as your client."

This was all the opening I needed. "Well, as a matter of fact, I've got a pretty tight schedule — loaded with assignments, you might say. Besides, I expect I'll have to be going down to Washington next week for one of the big oil companies, and —"

Joe Stevens rose and stuck out his hand. "I guess I shouldn't have bothered you, Mr. Mortimer. A big man like you, I know how it is — you wouldn't be interested in someone like me with only a measly three hundred dollar retainer —"

I grabbed his hand and held on, tight. Very, very tight. "Now, wait a minute! I was just about to say, money isn't everything, you know. Even though I'm running a business, I still have time for sentiment. And your notion of spreading love appeals to my idealistic side. Definitely! Er — do you happen to have the three hundred bucks with you?"

"Here it is."

With his free hand he drew a roll of small bills out of his pocket. With my free hand I managed to count and tuck the money away in my vest. And all the while I

was giving him the old fraternity grip and the old college try.

"I see great possibilities in your love serum, Stevens," I told him. "Should have no trouble at all selling it to the right parties. This isn't a matter of shoving propaganda at the public — what you want is to interest a few people with money and get this thing rolling. But first, I'd still feel better if I had a little demonstration."

"Whenever you like," he agreed. "Just come out to the house. If you weren't so busy and all, I'd have invited you to come home right now, for supper."

I grinned. "Like I say, Stevens, I'm a man of sentiment. Let's go."

Half an hour later I was standing on the doorstep of the Stevens bungalow and Stevens was doing the honors.

"Dorothy," he said, "I have a guest for dinner."

"So I see. Why didn't you call and let me know ahead of time?"

"Well, it was all so sudden. I mean, Mr. Mortimer here just got together with me and —"

"Together where? In some bar?"

"Now you know I don't drink, honey. This is business."

Dorothy Stevens sniffed. She wasn't a bad-looking tomato for a housewife-type, but that sniff told me all I wanted to know about Joe Stevens and his home-life. "What kind of business?" she asked, as the two kids ran out and grabbed Joe by the legs.

"You know, darling. The love potion. Mr. Mortimer is in public relations and he's going to promote it for me. He thinks there's a lot of possibility in it."

"Huh!" Tomatoes can be awfully sour.

"Now, sweetheart — we can tell you all about it at dinner."

"I suppose." She stood back and let us get past her into the living room. Joe Stevens dragged his kids along — they had their hands in his pockets and I kind of got the idea they had learned this particular tricks from watching Mama at work.

Dorothy Stevens went out into the kitchen as we sat down at the table and began to rattle pots and pans — which is a woman's way of swearing.

"Say," she called, "what did you do about the car?"

"What?" A look came over Stevens' face and I glanced around to see if I was on a rocking boat — because he certainly seemed to be seasick all of a sudden.

"You know perfectly well what," Dorothy called out. "I gave you three hundred dollars just before you left the house for the down-payment — all the money we got from Aunt Imogene's will. What did the man say? Will he take it on a trade-in?"

"I didn't get to the car-dealer."

"You didn't?" The rattling of

pots turned into a banging and crashing. "Then hand back the money — it isn't safe to carry so much around with you in cash."

"I — uh — haven't got the money."

The banging stopped. "You haven't? Then who has?"

"Well, Mr. Mortimer here needed a retainer if he's going to work on the formula, and so —"

There was a loud crash.

Joe Stevens rushed out into the kitchen and closed the door. I sat there and tried not to listen. The two kids were watching a cowboy kill fifty Indians on television, and the noise almost but not quite drowned out the sounds of murder from the kitchen.

Finally it was all over and Stevens tottered back into the room. He didn't look seasick any more. He looked drowned.

"Dorothy has a headache," he said. "We'll be eating alone, I guess. If you don't mind."

So we went into the kitchen and ate alone. The kids did all the talking during the meal, and most of the eating. But after we finished, I managed to drag Stevens back to business.

"Don't be discouraged," I told him. "Women just don't understand these things. But once we get rolling, and the money starts coming in, she'll be all right."

He cheered up, a little. "Thanks for being so patient with me," he said. "You know, Dorothy is really a fine wife — I couldn't ask for better. It's just that she hasn't got the faith I have in my inventions. Now, this compound —"

"Yes, let's see it," I told him. "You say you work in the cellar?"

He took me down there, and I got to admit he'd rigged up the best little laboratory I ever saw outside of a Universal Pictures horror movie. He had electric gadgets and test-tubes and coils and retorts; everything except Boris Karloff in a white robe and an old pair of rubber gloves. And he had a nice, pint-sized vial of bubbling yellow stuff that sparkled when he held it up to the light.

"Here it is — the compound."

I squinted at it. "Very pretty. Haven't seen anything like it since I served a hitch in the Army Medical Corps. But I got only one question — does it work?"

"Does it work? Of course it works. Take my word for it. I've tried it out. Here, you drink some and see for yourself."

"Not me, brother. I'm in public relations, how can I love people? But I insist on a demonstration."

There was a squawk from outside the cellar door.

"What's that?" yelled Stevens, jumping about a foot and almost spilling the liquid out of the vial.

"Oh, just some alley cat, I suppose."

"Alley cat?" A gleam came

into his eye; one of those genuine 18-karat Mad Scientist gleams. "Wait here."

He tiptoed to the door. There was a shriek and a scuffle and a snarl, and he came back with the cat in his arms. "Help me hold it now while I fill this hypodermic syringe," he panted. "There. Just a drop will do. Don't let it claw you! My, it's a fierce beast, isn't it? Now — let me make the injection here in the shoulder."

The cat jumped about a foot and landed on the table, back hunched and claws ready for action. It spit and snarled and — smiled. And then its tail began to wave. It purred. It came over and rubbed against my shoulders.

"See? Just one drop."

I shrugged.

"Want more proof? Wait a minute." He raced up the stairs and in a minute he was back with a cage in one hand. Something tiny and yellow fluttered and squeaked inside the cage, and when it saw the cat, it beat against the bars. He reached in with the hypodermic needle, and the canary quieted. It began to sing.

Then he set the cage down on the laboratory table and opened the door. The cat went over to the cage. The canary came out. The cat opened its mouth. It raised its paws. Then it purred and stroked the canary. The canary jumped up and perched on its head, chirping. The mewing and the chirping blended until they were doing a duet that sounded very much like half of a barbershop quartet singing *I Love You Truly.*

I stared, but there it was, right in front of my own eyes. One drop for each and they made beautiful mew-sic together.

"You win," I said. "I'm sold. And you mean to say this will work on anything? Animal or human?"

"Of course. It's all a glandular reaction, as I told you. The basic components —"

"Yeah. I know. And it's permanent, doesn't wear off?"

He frowned. "I can't answer that one fully, yet. I haven't had enough opportunity to experiment. Injections are all I've tried, and they seem permanent enough. It seems to me that spraying the entire skin surface would be even more of a guarantee of a permanent reaction. The oral method is another way of absorbing the compound. This I haven't been able to work with."

"Well, I hope you won't get me wrong," I said. "But it might be a good idea to test that idea right here at home. I mean, slipping a drink of this stuff to your wife —"

His frown got frownier. "I know what you mean," he sighed. "And I'd thought of it, even suggested it. But Dorothy won't cooperate. And she won't let me use it on the kids."

"You could sort of sneak it into her coffee or something, couldn't you?" I suggested. "No worse than a bad Mickey Finn."

"No, Mr. Mortimer, that's out. It isn't ethical. It violates the true spirit of Science."

I shrugged. "Okay, just a thought. And speaking of thoughts, now that I've seen it in action, what you want me to do with this stuff? I can promote it, but what's the gimmick? You must have some idea in mind."

"I have a purpose. A very serious purpose," he assured me.

"Making money is always serious," I agreed. "And I'm here to help. Is your idea to get this made up like some kind of a perfume and use it in an atomizer? So that a tomato can get the old love-light working in her boy friends' eyes? Or do you want it for salesmen only — slip it into customers' drinks so they'll love that product, huh? Or is it for political campaigns? Blow it out through the air-conditioning system in a meeting hall and have all the voters fall in a swoon for the candidate?"

"You can stop right there, Mr. Mortimer."

"Okay. But I got a million more ideas. When I go into action for a client, I really go into action."

"You have the wrong slant entirely. This discovery of mine will never be used commercially. While there may be money in it for me eventually, I do not intend to prostitute it commercially. This is a serious and important finding. I told you it could revolutionize the world, and that is what I plan it to do."

"Like how, for instance?"

"Mr. Mortimer, I need your help in only one thing; to enlist the attention of important people all over the nation. We must tell them about this discovery and promote its use. It is my hope that the government itself will take over the manufacture of my preparation and prepare bombs."

"Bombs?"

"Yes. Love-bombs, you might call them. A complete stockpile of bombs which can be dropped on foreign soil, exploded in quantities large enough to cover the face of the earth, and spread love throughout the entire world.

"Do you understand now what this means? It can be the end of wars, the end of hatred, the end of suspicion and enmity and fear. Men will love one another and my work will be done."

I blinked. "But won't it cost a fortune? What about the machinery to produce them? How about time?"

"It won't cost a fraction of what it costs us currently to maintain armaments," Stevens declared. "Regular detonating mechanisms can be used, filled with this concoction in fluid or

gas form, and they could be turned out in quantity within a period of two or three weeks. No, the whole thing is simple. All I need now is your advice and help in bringing this whole miraculous discovery to the attention of those in authority. And I hope you'll agree with me that it's a job worth doing."

He didn't look like a Mad Scientist any more. He looked like the starry-eyed idealist.

I thought about it for a minute. The whole notion was screwy, but it might work. Anyhow, the chemical *did* work. And it had great possibilities. Suppose the government would go for it? An exclusive contract to supply them with this elixir of love might run into a pretty penny or a beautiful buck. Stranger things have happened. Great nuts from little acorns grow, and when some dumb old Greek name of Archimedes or something invented the lever, little did he reck that some day from this simple discovery would spring the entire mighty slot-machine industry.

"I'll do it!" I said. "Meet me tomorrow morning, nine o'clock, in Bert Bugle's office."

"Bert Bugle?"

"The attorney," I explained. "First thing we gotta do is get this mixture patented. Protect it against anyone else stealing the formula. He knows his way around in Washington and he can steer us to the right guys to see. Cut through all this red tape, take us through to the President, maybe."

"Fine. I knew I could rely on you, Mr. Mortimer."

"See you at nine, then? Goodnight."

"Goodnight," said Stevens. The cat and the canary gave me a farewell serenade, and as I went out the door I could see the canary pecking at the cat's claws. The canary wasn't hurting the animal; just giving it a manicure.

Came nine o'clock. Came Stevens and I to Bert Bugle's office in the Banker's Building.

I went in ahead of Stevens and paved the way.

"Hi, Bert. How's life from the back of an ambulance? Have you habeased any good corpuses lately?"

"Mortimer! I've been looking for you! What are you doing about Mountain Dew? Six months ago I gave you a thousand-dollar retainer to promote it for me, and where are we? Halfway to bankruptcy, that's where!"

"But Bert —"

"I've got a lot of money tied up in that company. Everybody in Blue View is laughing at me because we can't sell the lousy stuff. I'll admit it's a vile-tasting bottled water, but you assured me you could put it on every table in the suburb for your fee. I've got a good mind to slap a lawsuit on you!"

"Bert! Listen a minute, will you? Never mind about the Mountain Dew. I've got something big for you in the outer office. Something really *big!*"

"Animal, vegetable, elphant?"

"This is real, this is *really* real. Come on out and meet a million dollars!"

At the mention of a million dollars, Bert Bugle calmed down. I led him out to meet Joe Stevens and commenced talking.

The whole pitch went just the way I'd planned. I told him what I had, what we wanted. Then I pulled the trump card. I sent Joe out for an alley-cat and told him to buy a canary in the pet shop downstairs. In five minutes he was back with a mangy, spitting tomcat and an anemic-looking canary. Out came the vial and the hypodermic syringe. In went the compound. And thus did Love come to Bert Bugle's office.

"There," I said. "Now do you understand?"

Bugle's eyes goggled. "Do I? Indeed I do! Mortimer, I want to talk to you for a moment, privately. If you'll excuse us, Mr. Stevens."

Bugle dragged me into his private office and slammed the door. Then he grabbed my collar. "Man," he panted. "Do you know what this means?"

"It means you're tearing my collar," I informed him.

"Never mind that. This love philtre, or whatever it is, works!"

"Of course it works, and it's going to be worth millions."

"Millions to Stevens, perhaps. But for me, it's plain bankruptcy."

"How do you figure that?"

"Well, suppose his scheme goes through — and it might, very easily. They start dropping love-bombs all over the place and what happens? People begin loving each other, that's what!"

"Is that bad?"

"It's awful!" Bugle groaned. "Eight years I went to school, ten years I spent building up a law practise. And now people are going to love each other. No more lawsuits! No more divorces! No more thefts, no more murders, and that means no more need for lawyers! Yes, and no need for judges, or sheriffs, or police. What kind of a deal is this, that I should cut my own throat?"

"But you'll be assured of a good fee for handling our work."

"Maybe so." Bugle stuck out his chin. "But after all, I owe something to the legal profession. I have ethics to maintain, and because I'm ethical, I can't stand by and see a man deliberately and coldbloodedly set out to ex-exterminate rape, arson, fraud, and all the things we attorneys hold so dear. No, I'm afraid I not only refuse — I must also go ahead and fight your scheme with every force at my command."

He turned to go back into the

other room where Joe waited.

"Just a minute, Bert. This guy Stevens is sincere, he's sacrificing everything for an ideal. Maybe you won't help us, but you can't fight us. It isn't fair!"

"Sorry. But I have no choice. And as for you, if you'd spent your time promoting Mountain Dew instead of running around with crackpots, I might have listened to you."

"All right," I sighed. "You win. But please, don't *tell* Stevens you're going to fight him. Just say you have too much other work or something."

"You talk like a crackpot yourself," Bugle sneered, "but that's your affair. Go on out and tell him I'm too busy to handle the deal. But I warn you, I'm going to get up a legal committee to pull strings in Washington against this. And as for you, I'm suing you for that thousand dollar retainer on Mountain Dew. Now, good day to you."

If that was Bert Bugle's contribution to a good day, I'd hate to see what he'd come up with for a bad one. I shuffled out, collected Stevens, the cat and the canary. In the car I told him a sob story about Bugle's health breaking down.

"But don't worry, we'll get somebody else. The world is full of lawyers."

"We'd better hurry. I haven't much time, and my money is running out. Lawyers cost a lot."

"But you've got a steady job."

"Oh, didn't I tell you? I quit yesterday. Figured this would be taking all our time from now on. Dorothy is plenty burned up about it, so it's up to you."

"Great!" I managed to keep the car on the road, but I was beginning to sweat a little. So far, in one day on the assignment I'd accomplished a lot. I'd made a man quit his job, set things up for his wife to leave him, and lined myself up for a lawsuit.

"You know, I have a lot of confidence in you, Mr. Mortimer. You sure know how to get things done." Stevens gave me that trusting look and I winced. "Now where are we going?"

"Where —? Why, to the newspaper, of course."

"Newspaper?"

"We need publicity, don't we? What's a better way of getting Washington to notice an important discovery? Why, this is front page news here — world-wide news." As I talked, I began to see the sense of that. Why hadn't I thought of it in the first place? Once we got our headlines, lawyers would come running to represent us. It was that simple.

"Here," I said. "You wait in the car. I'm going up and see the editor. Not the city editor — the managing editor, the big boy himself. Give me that vial, and the cat, and the canary."

I marched in. I knew my way around, and within five minutes I was sitting in Tom Mason's office. The vial was in my hand, the cat was on my lap, and the canary was sitting on my left ear.

"Now listen, Mortimer, if this is another one of your crazy stunts." Mason began to make noises like an executive. I cut him short and launched into my story. Thirty seconds of it was enough to quiet him down, and a minute had him gasping.

The cat meowed, the canary chirped, I talked, and Mason gurgled. Finally his gurglings turned into words.

"And it really works?" he choked. "You can drop love-bombs on the whole world, even Russia?"

"I personally guarantee it."

"It's a miracle!" wheezed Mason.

"Then you'll give it a front-page spread? I've got the guy downstairs in my car right now, ready for pictures. You can play up the local boy angle, get it on the wire services!"

"I'd sooner run my own obituary!"

"What?"

"Get out of here before I throw you out!"

"You mean you don't believe me?"

"Of course I believe you. And that's just why I won't touch the story with a ten-foot pole. Can't you see what would happen if they did drop love-bombs? War would stop, wouldn't it? And crime, too. There wouldn't be any stories for newspapers to run any more, and I'd be out of business in a year."

"But couldn't you run stories about *nice* things? About the good, constructive actions people would be engaged in? Isn't that news, too?"

"My boy, always remember one thing. Good news is no news. No, I'll have no part of it. And don't try any of your publicity stunts because they won't work. I'll give orders to kill any story mentioning love-bombs. And that's final."

His secretary stuck her beak through the door, thus completing her resemblance to Woody Woodpecker, and sniffed. "Mr. Mason, there's a Mr. Bugle on the phone for you."

"Bert Bugle?" I asked.

"Neighbor of mine out in Blue View. Wonder what he wants." Mason moved towards the phone and waved me out. "Get out of here, Mortimer, but remember what I said. No story. Not now, or ever!"

I got out. Down and out. No story, and already Bugle and Mason would be getting together. They had to be neighbors, yet! How could I lick this thing? Every step took me closer to the

edge of ruin. Nobody wanted love, so go fight City Hall. Tell it to your Congressman.

"Knocklewort!" I shouted.

Joe Stevens blinked at me as I opened the car door.

"Knocklewort! That's our answer! We're going to see Congressman Knocklewort!"

"But what about the papers?"

"Oh, that." I gulped. "The editor was afraid to break the yarn without an official OK. Security measures, you know; talk about dropping bombs and stuff might upset people. Have to clear it with the government. Knocklewort's our man. He's Congressman for this district, he's in town this week, and besides, I once handled his campaign for him. We'll tell him the story and let him take it right to Washington."

We were off to the Hotel Tippmore, vial, cat and canary. And when I got through to Gifford Knocklewort's suite, I took the whole menagerie upstairs with me, including Joe Stevens.

Once again I went into the now familiar pitch. I told old Knocklewort the whole story, watching his face through a cloud of cigar smoke. One thing about Knocklewort — even though he is a Congressman, he very seldom blows out anything but smoke. He kept his mouth shut until I'd finished, and I waited very anxiously for a reaction. Finally, it came.

"Sorry, I'd like to help you, but it's out."

"Think of the publicity, Congressman! You, as sponsor of this idea, taking it to the President. Why, you'll be hailed as the saviour of the world! This thing is big! I'll bet you could be the next President yourself, with this deal."

"President of what?" asked Knocklewort. "A bankrupt nation?"

"But it wouldn't cost much to make these bombs," Joe Stevens explained. "I have the formula all worked out, ready to go."

"Isn't that just lovely?" Knocklewort spread his palms upward. "Now work out another formula showing how people can get along in this country after you drop your bombs. Your cat here, and your canary can get along — they've got others to feed them. But people can live only by working. Working means business. Business means competition. Competition means progress. Progress won't exist once folks start to love each other. They won't want to step on each other's toes, take advantage of one another.

"Why, in six months business would be at a standstill and this nation would be ruined. For that matter, if folks start to live in harmony, they won't need any government — and I'll be out of a job!"

I couldn't stand to look at

Stevens' face, so I sat down. The young chemist was getting a new formula into his head — a formula of what makes the world go around.

"Sorry, young man." Knockle-wort put his arm around Joe Stevens' shoulders. "I'm as much in favor of love as the next man — kiss a lot of babies when I campaign — but there just isn't any place for it in business, or politics either. Now, if you'll excuse me, I have a dinner engagement to keep. Old friend of yours, Mortimer. Tom Mason. Know him well, don't you?"

"Yes," I sighed. "I know him. Well, come on, Joe. Let's go."

We went. Stevens was scowling, and even the cat and the canary seemed to have lost their sex appeal for each other. But in the car, Stevens turned to me with every tooth gritted.

"I'm not licked yet," he said. "Can you leave for Washington with me next week?"

"Why, you don't want to do that, my boy. First of all, it costs too much money."

"Never mind. Dorothy's going to leave me. Oh, don't think I haven't realized that! She'll leave the minute she hears we aren't getting anywhere. So I might as well sell the house. And I'll take the money to finance us. We'll go to Washington and see the President himself!"

"Now look, son." I faced Joe Stevens and for a moment it was as if I actually were facing a son of mine. "You might as well know the truth. Bert Bugle isn't sick. He just won't touch your problem because he thinks love will ruin the legal profession. And Tom Mason isn't afraid of censorship. He believes love will kill newspaper circulation. You heard what the Congressman told you. And you're going to get the same story everywhere. It will be the same in Washington.

"So you had better realize one thing right now. This world doesn't want love. It isn't ready for love yet on a large scale. Oh, it might work for individuals. It always has, you know. And it might even work for a small community. But not for the masses."

"I can't believe it," Stevens sighed.

"You'd better believe it. Because you're going to be fought tooth and nail. As I left Mason's office, Bert Bugle was already calling him on the phone to warn him about your love-bomb menace. And now, the Congressman is dining with Mason. They're probably all going to get together and run you out of town. I advise you to forget this scheme, go back to Dorothy, take your old job. And — much as it hurts me to do this — here's your three hundred bucks back."

Stevens managed to find a smile

and spread it over his face. It didn't quite reach. "Never mind the money," he said. "You stuck by me, and you tried your best to help."

"Please take it. I don't want your dough."

He shook his head and I was surprised that nothing rattled. "No, it's yours. I'm going home now and see what Dorothy is going to do." Stevens made a gesture that included the cat, the canary, and the vial of love potion. "You might as well keep these as souvenirs. I won't be needing them."

I nodded, then plodded up the street. The cat followed me, purring, with the canary hitching a free ride on his back. I held the vial in my hand and looked for a sewer. No sense keeping this stuff. It was just bad medicine. Nobody wanted love. Bert Bugle was right. I should have stuck to Mountain Dew Water.

Then the thought sneaked up and kicked me in the pants. I stopped plodding and started running.

I didn't stop running until around ten o'clock that night, when I ended up panting on Joe Stevens' doorstep.

He opened the door and I breezed in.

"Mortimer. What brings you here?"

"A taxi. But never mind that. I came to tell you that we're saved."

"Saved?"

"Just came from Mason's house. He and Congressman Knocklewort and Bert Bugle have agreed to call off their feud. Bert Bugle isn't going to sue me either. We can have all the publicity we want, Bugle will get us our patent protection, and Knocklewort himself will go to Washington for us to see the President!"

"Wait a minute. How did all this happen?"

"You did it! Or, rather, your love potion did it. Remember the vial you left with me?"

Stevens nodded.

"Well, I got to thinking. All three of these birds were having dinner together. If a delivery man showed up at the back door with some Mountain Dew Table Water. And if they drank it at dinner — and if this water happened to contain the love potion."

"You did it!"

It was my turn to nod. "Then, when I figured the stuff had plenty of time to get in its licks, I showed up at the front door. The rest was easy as pie. They loved me. They loved you. They loved the idea. They loved everybody. So we're all set. Now we can begin our campaign." I paused, waiting for the applause. "What's the matter, Joe? Doesn't it get you excited?"

Stevens stared out of the window. "You forget what I told you," he said. "If my potion is

injected, the effect is permanent. If it's sprayed on to the skin surface it's also sure to last forever. But if you just drink a small amount, it wears off, perhaps in a matter of a few hours. Tomorrow those men will be free of its influence and they'll go back to opposing us."

"But we can keep them hopped up with the water forever if needs be," I argued. "I can manage to slip them drinks all day long."

"It's no use. They're not the only ones who have to be sold. No, Mortimer, you've shown me today that you can't sell love to the world. Everybody in Washington will be the same way and you can't change human nature."

"Guess I never thought of that angle." I glanced at him closely. "But that isn't all you have on your mind, is it?"

Stevens pointed towards the door. "See those suitcases? Dorothy packed up when she heard the news. She's ready to leave now. Don't know what's keeping her."

"That's tough," I said. "If there's anything I can do to help —" I stopped and sniffed. "You smell anything burning?"

"You're right, there is something burning!" Stevens wheeled around. "It's the cellar! The house is on fire. Come on!"

We clattered down the basement steps and into the smoky cellar. But the house wasn't on fire. I saw only two things burning down there. Stevens' wife, Dorothy, and a little pile of papers on the laboratory table.

Since Dorothy seemed to be burning only with rage, I turned my attention to the pile of papers. "Get some water!" I yelled. Stevens ran to the laundry tub, filled a pail, and splashed the contents over the charred fragments on the table.

"What's the big idea?" he asked. Dorothy made a little sound that might have been a laugh and might also have been a sob.

"It's too late," she said. "I did it."

"Did what —?" Stevens stopped and stared.

"I burned the formula. The formula for the love potion."

"But —"

"Love potion!" She *was* sobbing, now. "All it ever caused was trouble. And even though I'm leaving, — yes, I *am* leaving and for good, so don't try to talk me out of it — I wanted to get rid of that horrible elixir forever!"

Stevens sat down and covered his face. "Two years of work shot to pieces!" he groaned. "Nothing to show for it but the little flask on the table."

Dorothy was over to the table and back again before I'd noticed it. She thrust the flask into my hands. "Here, Mr. Mortimer!

A little farewell gift for you. A token of my personal appreciation for busting up my family, busting up my husband's life. Now, get out of here! Get out of here and take this damned love with you!"

I held the flask and stared at the yellowish liquid. I held love in my hands and it was cold and pale. I didn't like it, because nobody loves love. It doesn't work for the masses, only for individuals.

"Here," I said to Dorothy. "A little farewell gift for you, too!"

Lifting the flask, I broke it over the top of her head. She went down in a heap, with the love potion splashing all over her.

"You $\$\#\%\&@¢/*!!!$" yelled Stevens — only, he yelled it much more plainly than that. "Trying to kill my wife, huh? Just let me get my hands on you —"

The proposition didn't appeal to me. I turned and ran. The last I ever saw of Joe Stevens, he was sitting on the cellar floor holding his wife in his arms, trying to revive her.

Yes, that was the last I ever saw of Stevens. But I heard from him once, since then.

About a week afterwards, he called me on the phone.

"I'm the happiest man in the world," he told me. "And I can never thank you enough for all you did for me."

"It was nothing, really."

"First of all, you showed me that this business of reforming the world is a lot of foolishness. No one man or one idea is big enough to do the trick. So I went around and got my old job back again. From now on, I'm sticking to Dog Biscuits."

"And your wife?" I asked.

"Ever since you hit Dorothy on the head she's been a new woman. She adores me. And you deserve the thanks for it."

I smiled to myself. "Sort of thought that would do the trick," I said. "Couldn't figure out a better use for the last of the love potion than to spray her with it. You said it would be permanent."

"I guess it is." Stevens hesitated. "Just one thing you should know, though — only don't ever let my wife hear about it."

"What's that?"

"She made a mistake. There really was none of the love potion left at all."

"But the stuff I splashed on her from the flask —"

The happiest man in the world chuckled. "That was some cleaning fluid I had lying around."

He hung up, and I suppose that's the way the story ends. But there really *was* a love potion, and I can prove it. Come around to my office anytime and take a look at my cat and my canary.

Or, if you'd prefer to wait about a month or so, I think I'll be able to show you the only kittens in the world with wings.

Never Mind A MARTIAN

By WILLIAM P. McGIVERN

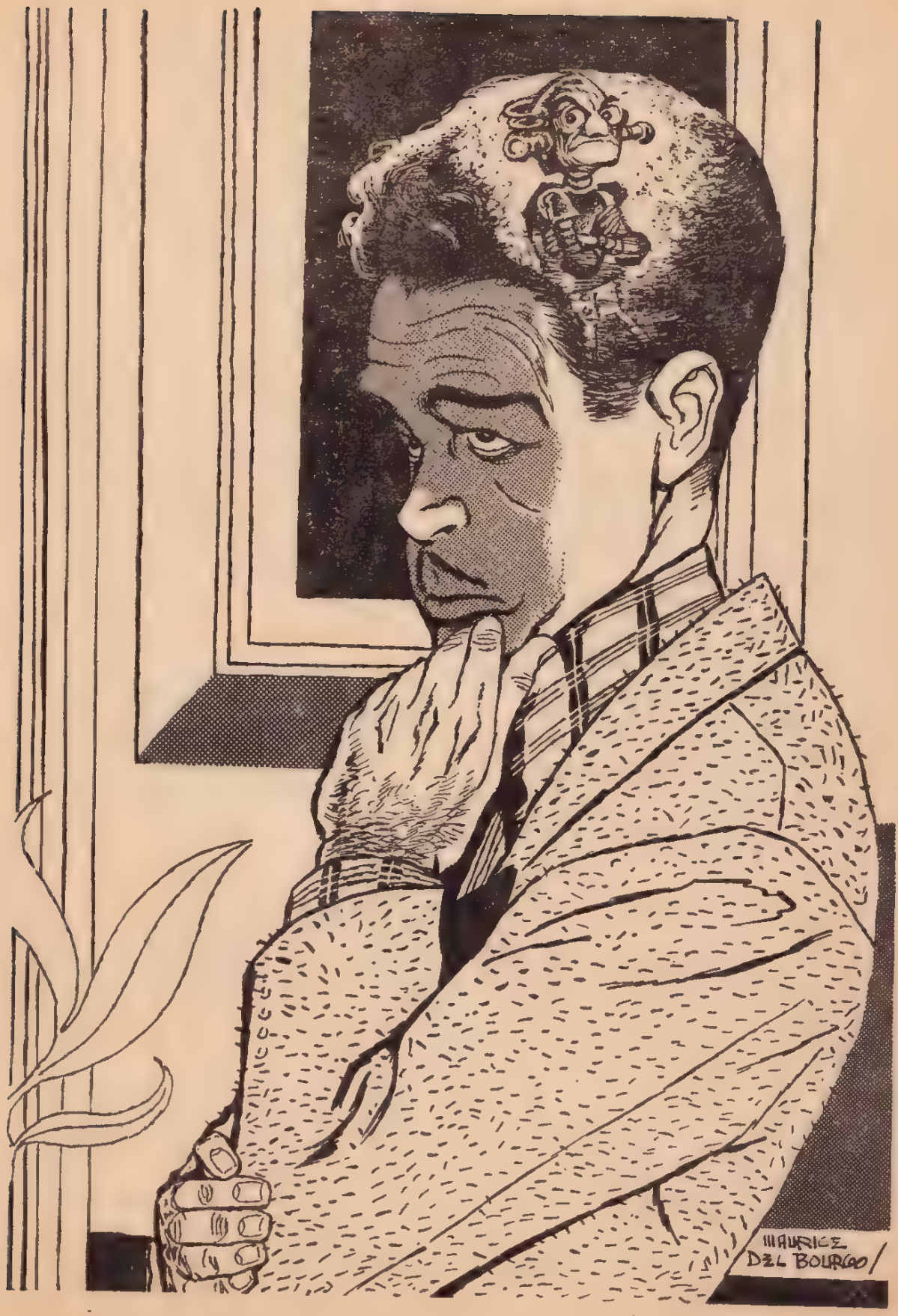
Bill McGivern has conducted Reggie through some pretty zany adventures. Or is it the other way around? Anyhow, in this particular concoction of hilarity, the problem of housing comes up. The character wishing to relocate is a Martian, with a typical Martian yearning for peace and complete solitude. The Martian, a small, airy being, found exactly what he was looking for. Where? Why, inside of Reggie's head! But, sadly enough, the premises were found to be completely unfurnished.

AFTER the revolution had been put down, violently and efficiently, the Djehrians — who were the fiercest rebels — continued to meet and plot in the vast windy darkness of the caves outside the city of Dar.

Dar was the largest metropolis of the planet Mars, the capital of the incumbent administration. It was ringed by massive black mountains, and these were honeycombed with an intricate network of tunnels, rivers, waterfalls, caves and chambers. Here — in this black labyrinth — the Djehrians met to plan their fight against the Rulers.

It was dangerous business. Guard troops of the Rulers prowled the caves and tunnels, their ruthless efficiency heightened by the bounty that had been placed on the heads of the rebel cabal. The meeting place was changed nightly, and the rebels flitted to the appointed cave singly or in pairs, taking the utmost care to make certain that they were not observed or followed.

But still there were leaks. Informers thronged the city of Dar, willing and eager to sell out the rebels to the Rulers. And eventually and inevitably the identity of the Djehrians' leader was dis-


MAURICE
DEL BOURGO

closed to the Guards. And the Guards prepared to pounce on him.

But the Djehrians had informers too, and from one of these they learned of the Guards' plans. They convened in one of the great dark caves within two hours after receiving this ominous information. Their leader Der — who was indistinguishable from the towering, wraith-like figures of his comrades — listened attentively as a variety of countermeasures were proposed and rejected.

Finally one member cried, "Der must flee. Der must not be annihilated. Der must flee."

A chorus of reedy voices took up this suggestion, repeating it until it swelled to the proportions of a chant.

Then Der raised his arms. "There is no place to flee to," he said. "The cities of Kara and Mo are crawling with spies. And I am known there. The waters and skies are patrolled by the Guards."

There was a gloomy, despairing silence until someone said, "Der must leave Mars. There is no other hope."

This caused a babble of discussion. Flee Mars? But where? To Jupiter? Certainly not! The rulers of Mars were friendly with the rulers of Jupiter. And certainly not to Venus. Der would perish in that wilderness.

Finally someone said, "Earth!"

There was a silence. "It is too much to ask of Der," a voice said at last.

A reedy rumble of agreement followed this.

But after more discussion someone brought the subject back to earth. There was no other place for Der to go, and unless he went there immediately all was lost.

"There is a primitive sort of life on that planet," one of Der's chief advisers said. "We could dematerialize you, and ship you there tonight."

"You could lodge yourself with one of their primitive life forms," another said.

"We can select one now —"

"And pick you up with the machine in a month's time —"

"At determined coordinates —"

"It will not be too horrible —"

"You will be saved —"

"It is your only chance," the top adviser said, cutting firmly through these splintered cries.

Der was silent for a long interval. Then he said, "Very well," in a small sad voice. Then, with a touch of bitterness, he added: "It is the price we must pay for survival. But it is a high one. To lodge in the brain of a primitive earth unit! It is a monstrous prospect. But I accept it."

At this demonstration of patriotism, a reverent little sigh swept through the rebels and mingled eerily with the great winds

which clawed through the dark caves . . .

Three weeks after this decision had been reached, Reggie van Ameringen was lounging carelessly over the bar in his club, listening with relish to a tale that Ferdie Myrtlehead was telling him about his uncle. Reggie was a tall, slim, elegantly dressed young man, with blond hair and innocent blue eyes. His face was narrow and bony, and its customary expression was one of vacant good-humor. There were lots of people who insisted that Reggie was nobody's fool; they claimed on the contrary that he was *anybody's* fool.

Ferdie Myrtlehead, a plump young man with a round and silly face, had come from a long line of assorted nuts. And he was intensely proud of this. He maintained that he admired anything perfect, and his family were all perfect asses.

"— Blew all his homes up one summer," he was saying now, shaking his head and chuckling softly. "Uncle Abner was quite a card."

"I say!" Reggie said admiringly. "Man of character, what?"

"Full of it, chock full. Thought they were getting surly. Fact! 'Damndest bunch of surly houses I ever saw' he used to say. And he wasn't a man to take a surly house lying down. Hired engineers, dynamite blokes, and went all over the country, everywhere he had a house, and blew them to hell." Ferdie was choking with laughter now. "Palm Springs, Newport, Bar Harbor — everywhere. Then he'd walked through the rubble shouting, 'Get surly with me, will you? Imitation damn French manor house, that's all you are.' Ever hear of a fool like that, huh?"

Direct questions always startled Reggie. They demanded an answer, which meant you had to know the question. And that was no snap. Things slipped out of Reggie's mind very easily. Frowning, he clung hard to Ferdie's question. "Well," he said, playing the game, "I've got a nephew who hates swimmers. Once he filled his swimming pool with jello, and then had a night-time swimming party. Couple of his best friends had to be pulled out by the fire department." He looked hopefully at Ferdie.

"Not bad, not bad," Ferdie said with the patronizing tone of a connoisseur.

They ordered two more gin slings and adjusted themselves to new positions at the bar. It was only three in the afternoon, with long hours ahead of them.

"How's Sari?" Ferdie said, after a grateful sip of his fresh drink.

"Sari?"

"You know. Red-haired girl."

"Oh, yes. She's grand." A thought struck him and he smiled. "We're getting married, you know."

"Well, of course. That's why I asked. Is she lost in bride-like twitterings?"

"She seems frightfully excited about it," Reggie said. "I can't imagine why, frankly." He stared at his long vacant face in the bar mirror. "Girls are strange creatures. Spooky, if you know what I mean."

"Quite. Did I ever tell you about my Aunt Minerva?" Ferdie swigged his drink, and then began to chuckle. "Now there was a fine, gamy old loon. Wanted to be a policeman. Bought a uniform, whistle, the whole kit and kaboodle. Went around arresting people, dragging them into station houses. Always made fearful rows when they sent her packing."

"Aunt, uncle," Reggie said, and snapped his fingers. "Reminds me. I've got to dash. Big event this afternoon. Meeting Sari's uncle. Cheerio, old chap."

"Oh, I say now," Ferdie said dejectedly. "You're leaving me in the lurch. Phone her and tell her you'll be late. I've got a grand story about my Uncle Sisyphus you've never heard. Be a good chap. How about it?"

"Righto, I'll give her a buzz," Reggie said.

It was at this instant that Reggie felt a peculiar knocking inside his head. Normally he would have ignored it; he was quite used to buzzings, rappings and other varieties of cranial disturbances. There was even a noise like that of escaping steam which he could hear very distinctly after he had drunk too many stingers. But this knocking was followed immediately by a voice which said, "There will be no stories of Uncle Sisyphus. I've had enough, do you hear?"

Reggie glanced at Ferdie, somewhat hurt. "Well, old man, if you're going to be piggish about your stories, I'll just toddle along."

"What are you babbling about?" Ferdie said pleasantly.

"Wasn't babbling," Reggie said. His voice and manner were stiff. "You said no stories about Uncle Sisyphus. Very well. I'll bite the bullet, stiff upper lip, and all the rest of it. Chap won't tell his best friend a little story, well nothing to do but cut the fellow."

"I say, old fellow, this is pretty thick. I'm *going* to tell you the story. What gave you the idea I wasn't?"

"You said you wouldn't," Reggie said.

"No, *I* said that," the voice said.

Reggie raised his eyebrows. He had been watching Ferdie, and the bloke's lips hadn't moved. And they were the only persons at the bar. Good stunt, he thought shrewdly. Tossing the old voice

about like a bouncing beanbag.

"Where did you learn that one?" he asked, feeling a little dig of envy.

Ferdie rubbed his chin. "You all right?" he asked. "No hot flashes, pains in the head, flutters in the stomach?"

"Feel fine. Top hole."

"Let's start over again. Two drinks, bartender. Well, Uncle Sisyphus thought for a long while that he was an automobile. So one day —"

There was a knocking and battering within Reggie's head that caused a technicolored asortment of lights to blaze before his eyes. And the voice, grim and desperate now, cried, "No! I've heard enough of this inane drivel. I can't stand anymore."

"Oh I say, shut up," Reggie said. "You're turning into a shattering bore."

Ferdie paused. He twisted his drink about in his fingers slowly. Then he sighed. "Very well," he said moodily. "It's all I've got though, these little yarns about the bats in the family tree. I suppose it would be different if I had a job, or a dog, or a wife. But I'm all alone."

"But look, old chap, I wasn't talking to *you*," Reggie said.

Ferdie patted his shoulder. There was a fine hammy film of moisture in his eyes. "Never mind, Reggie. I've become a silly ass, boring my friends with old stories. A joke, a fool, a tiresome old twaddle-monger." He shook his head. "I didn't plan it this way."

And with that he wandered off in the direction of the pool room, sticking Reggie for eight gin slings.

But that didn't bother Reggie. He had an enormous problem on his mind, and this mind of his was not constructed to deal with problems of any sort. He looked cautiously around the oak-panelled bar room. Empty. Good, he thought warily. No one around to toss voices about like beanbags.

Then the voice said clearly, "I *told* you there would be no stories about Uncle Sisyphus. You had better get used to believing me, my friend."

"Now see here, who are you?" Reggie demanded.

The bartender looked up at him without much interest. Young Reggie was, in his opinion, a likeable idiot whose normal, everyday behavior would have thrown a psychiatric convention into a tizzy. He wasn't a bit surprised that Reggie was talking to himself. It figures, he thought, and went back to his racing form.

"Who are you?" Reggie demanded again.

"I am Der."

"Where?" Reggie looked around the empty room and scratched

his head. The pronunciation of the last word had a Brooklyn aroma, but he didn't see how that would help solve his problem. Reggie knew no one from Brooklyn. He didn't known where Brooklyn was, as a matter of fact.

"Der is my name," the voice said sharply.

Reggie studied the walls, the floor, the top of the bar.

"Sorry, old bean, but I don't see it," he said. This was a clever way to handle it, he thought. Get the chap on the run.

"Stop acting like a fool," the voice said. "My name is spelled D E R."

"Oh, I get it now," Reggie said, "I thought you were saying 'there'." He slapped his palm on the bar and giggled uncontrollably. "You see, old chap, I thought that —"

"I know what you thought, you tittering half-wit," the voice said.

Reggie was undisturbed by this boorish comment. "Well, we have it all straightened out, at any rate," he said. "But there's one thing puzzling me. Where in the deuce are you?"

"I am inside your head," the voice said.

Reggie thought this over, chewing pensively on his lip. It was an intriguing idea. Bloke inside his head, chatting away to him as if they were at a cocktail party.

"Well, well," he said. "You comfortable in there?"

"It's roomy and drafty. You have a fifth, no, a tenth-rate sort of mind, even by Earth standards."

"Clear out if you don't like it," Reggie said.

"I can't, for a time," the voice said. "Now listen to me closely. I've been inside your consciousness for three weeks. In one more week I must leave. And you must take me to the place from which I will depart. Do you understand?"

"Where do you have to go?"

"I do not know yet. I will tell you in good time."

"I see." Reggie thought everything over again, then shrugged. And this bloke, in spite of his bad manners, didn't seem like a bad egg. After all, he'd put in three weeks upstairs without sounding off, and this showed character. Reggie knew his own mind pretty well, and it was no place he liked to be cooped up in for very long.

"Okay, Der," he said. "But how'd you get in, and all the rest of it? Pretty good trick, I'd say."

"I am from Mars."

"Oh, that tips the old hand. Simple for a Martian, eh?"

"Quite simple," Der said. There was a definite strain in his voice now, as if he were maintaining his calm with a mighty effort of will. "You are not surprised? None

of this dumbfounds you, explodes your previous insular concepts?"

"No, I take people pretty much as they come," Reggie said modestly. He glanced at his watch. "Look, old bean, I've got to dash along. You'll come, of course?"

"Of course," Der said. "I must go with you, don't you understand?"

"Oh, I get your point. Rum thing. I'm meeting an awful fathead. Just pay no attention to him. But there's a lovely girl you may enjoy."

"I'm not interested in your friends or activities," Der said, returning to his cold and haughty manner. "I shall retire into silence until I have use for you."

"Righto. Nestle down in the old sponge and make yourself comfortable."

Reggie started to leave, strangely buoyed up by this marvellous development, but his secret was too juicy to keep under wraps. He winked at the bartender, and beckoned him to come closer.

"Look, don't spread this around, but I've got a Martian in my head," he said, beaming proudly. "Keep it mum, eh? Want to tell Ferdie about it myself."

The bartender nodded slowly. "You put an ice pack on your head, that'll get rid of that Martian. They hate the cold."

"Hate the cold, eh? Is that a fact?"

"Fact," the bartender said, and returned to his racing form. He stared at the paper for a few moments, his lips moving slowly, and then he crumpled it up and threw it on the floor. Then he beat his forehead with the palm of his hand. "Martian in his head," he muttered. "Is any job worth it?" he said, staring at Reggie's slender figure as it moved gracefully through the corridor that led to the street.

Reggie caught a cab in front of the club and was ringing Sari's doorbell ten minutes later. He was whistling cheerily now, tapping out an accompaniment to the melody with the toe of a glossy black Oxford, his mood sunny and benign. It had been a jolly kind of day, all things considered. Lots of good talk with Ferdie, a few bracing drinks and now Sari. There'd been something else too, something rather exciting, but Reggie couldn't remember what it had been. Well, no mind . . .

Sari opened the door and he kissed her fondly on the forehead. She was an amazingly pretty girl, with red hair, gray-green eyes, and a lovely figure.

"I can't believe you're on time," she said. "It's just not like you."

Reggie waved a hand modestly. "Blokes at the club call me steady Reggie now," he said. "Responsible fellow, they say. Good chap

to ask about investments and what to do with wild younger sons."

"Oh, I'm sure," Sari said, smiling at him. "Well, do come in. I want you to meet my Uncle Ed. He's all the family I've got, so I want you two to get along beautifully."

Uncle Ed was standing by the fireplace in Sari's elegantly furnished living room. He was a lean, whipcordish man in his middle fifties, with weather-roughened features and cold, stormy gray eyes.

"Glad to meet Sari's lucky young man," he cried, wringing Reggie's hand and pounding him on the back with sledge-hammer blows. He laughed heartily. "You make her happy, or you'll have me to reckon with, you young buck."

"Is she unhappy?" Reggie said, glancing anxiously at Sari. "Something upset you today?"

Sari — who knew Reggie very well — smiled and said, "Let's have a drink, shall we?" At this moment, she didn't want to expose her Uncle to Reggie's curious logic.

They all had a drink. Uncle Ed delivered a toast in ringing tones, and then settled down to what was obviously his chief passion in life — talking about himself. He had been a military man for thirty years, he told Reggie, as he strode back and forth before the fireplace as if he were on guard duty in a dangerous jungle outpost. The only life for a man, he claimed. Keeping the flag up and the beggars down, the flash of cold steel in foreign lands, the tramp of foot soldiers, the thunder of artillery — these were the totems he had revered for thirty years. And now it was over. The old soldier was back to rest at the hearthside. A bayonet wound from Tobruk had been acting up, and he couldn't fight anymore. This wound, he implied with a total lack of subtlety, was all that had kept him from straightening out the situation in Korea in jig time.

Finally, he stopped and looked at Reggie. "Well, how about yourself?" he asked in his hearty, barracks-room voice. "Army?"

"Well, no." Reggie said.

"Navy?"

Reggie shook his head.

"Ah, the Marines, eh?" Uncle Ed said, rubbing his hands. "They were a damned fine bunch of fighting men."

"I was in the Coast Guard," Reggie said.

"Coast Guard?" Uncle Ed's voice left no doubt as to what he thought of *that*. "Well, well," he said.

"That's right. I was an orderly to a Commander."

Uncle Ed strangled on his drink. "An orderly?" he said, at last.

"Yes, he was an awfully good chap," Reggie said. "The commander, I mean." He sensed in his woolly way that he was making a bad impression on Uncle Ed. What in the devil did the man want? Victor McLaglen?

"I see," Uncle Ed said, peering into his glass. His expression was that of a man who had seen a bug floating there.

The afternoon drew to a close. Sari was seeing her feminine friends that evening, so Reggie was dismissed for the day with instructions to report the following morning. She came with him to the door and kissed him on the cheek. "Don't mind Uncle Ed," she said. "He's an old fire-eater, and he's got the idea — from God knows what bad movie — that his mission in life is to protect helpless females. Don't worry about him, please."

"Maybe he'll be drafted," Reggie said hopefully. "Well, ta, ta."

Cabbing to his apartment Reggie was in a gloomy mood. Sari was a delightful girl and he longed to settle down with her in a cozy billet for two. But the prospect of having a trumpeting ass like Uncle Ed around was distinctly bleak. Well, we'll burn that bridge when we come to it, he decided philosophically.

Then the voice inside his head sounded once more. "You are completely right," Der said. "This uncle is a real staggering idiot."

Reggie was cheered to find this unexpected support. It increased his good opinion of Der. "I knew you'd think so," he said warmly.

At home, Reggie felt much better. His man, Clive, made him a nourishing drink, and Reggie settled down in a deep chair with a sigh of contentment.

"Clive, old bean," he said, "a dashed funny thing happened to me today."

"Yes, sir?" Clive was a tall, balding man with the manners of an earl. He raised his eyebrows and regarded his young master (whom he knew to be an imbecile) with an expression blended of interest and suspicion. He had learned to be wary of the 'funny' things that happened to Reggie.

"It's difficult to explain," Reggie went on in a musing tone. "But the fact is I've got a Martian inside my head. Not a bad chap, either. Sound, you know."

"Yes, sir," Clive said, after a short pause.

Reggie felt a burst of affection for the man. There were blokes you could count on, and Clive was one of them. Also the bartender at the club. You gave them a bit of out-of-the-way news and they took it like men. No, 'Good Gods' or 'I says!' Steady types, that's what they were. He wondered how Uncle Ed would take news like that. Probably want to

shoot the Martian, or hack him to bits. Brag about it afterwards in his club, the bounder.

"Will that be all?" Clive said.

"Carry on," Reggie said, with a languid wave of his hand.

Reggie's spirits stayed high until after dinner. And then something occurred which plunged them down to his boots. The door bell sounded, and Clive announced Sari's Uncle Ed.

Uncle Ed had two pigskin grips with him, which Clive relieved him of with some hauteur, and Reggie immediately feared the worst.

And his fears were not groundless.

"I thought you might put me up until after the wedding," Uncle Ed said, stripping off his gloves. "Nice little spot you've got here, I must say."

"Must you?" Reggie muttered.

Uncle Ed fixed a cold and stormy eye on him. Then he put his hands on his hips. "Sari has told me that your marriage plans have been cancelled unexpectedly on several occasions in the past. She is an innocent and lovable young woman, and doesn't have my knowledge of the world. She regards these defections of yours as something — ah — whimsical and unimportant. However, I don't. And I will say this to you now, Reggie. You will marry Sari Saturday morning, as per plan, or you will have me to reckon with. Do you understand?"

"But of course I'm marrying her," Reggie protested.

"Precisely." Uncle Ed swung his gloves into his open palm and they made an emphatic report in the silence. "I've handled things like this before, if I may say so. In less tender spots in the world. We have ways to enforce compliance, we old soldiers. There's the stake-out on an ant-hill, for one. You wouldn't like it, Reggie."

"Well, of course I wouldn't," Reggie said nervously.

"We'll say no more about it then," Uncle Ed said. "Now, please ask your man to show me to my room. I'll be here to keep an eye on you, remember."

Clive took Uncle Ed off and returned a few moments later to find Reggie sunk in a morass of gloom. Clive cleared his throat delicately and said, "If you'll forgive my saying so, sir, your prospective relative-in-law is not likely to creep into my heart."

"Well put," Reggie said listlessly.

"He's a soldier, I gather?"

"Regular old fire-horse. Held the bridle of Hannibal's elephant, to hear him tell it. Ghastly fellow."

"Hmmmn," Clive said. "Old soldier, eh?" There was a thoughtful look on his long, intelligent face.

The wedding was set for Saturday morning at eleven o'clock. Reggie was up at nine, ate a hearty breakfast and then showered and adorned himself in a cutaway jacket, striped trousers and spats. He was in a very jolly mood. After the wedding there would be no need for Uncle Ed's jailer-like presence, and they would send the old fool packing. He was putting a carnation in his lapel when a knock sounded on his door.

It was Uncle Ed, impeccably turned out, his mustaches waxed to fine needle-points.

"Ah, the happy day," he said, taking a stroll about the room. "I'm glad you're ready bright and early. We can leave for the church anytime you say."

Reggie perceived that Uncle Ed was going to stick to him like a mustard plaster until the jolly old knot was spliced.

"Fine," he said.

"Good. I'll be with you until the ceremony. Moral support, and all that." He laughed insincerely.

It was then the blow fell. Der — who had been silent for so long that Reggie had forgotten about him — said in a firm voice, "It is time for you take me to my place of departure."

"What do you mean?"

"What's that?" Uncle Ed asked, looking at Reggie oddly.

"I wasn't talking to you," Reggie said. "I've got somebody else in my mind."

"*On* your mind, you mean," Uncle Ed said.

"No — yes," Reggie said.

"We must leave," Der said. "We have a long trip to make. I have received the coordinates. Our destination is California."

Reggie started nervously. "I say, that's impossible," he said.

"You would prevent me from returning home?"

"Well, that's pretty sticky," Reggie said sympathetically. "You want to go home, eh?"

"I'm staying right here," Uncle Ed cried in his parade ground voice. "What gave you the idea I'm going home?"

"Don't bother talking to this idiot," Der said. "You'll only confuse matters. Now listen carefully: we must leave immediately. Unless you cooperate I will have to be disagreeable. For instance —"

The voice trailed off and Reggie felt a sudden splitting pressure growing inside his head. "I say!" he cried.

"Just a sample," Der said. "Now unless you want your skull plastered about the walls you had better cooperate."

The pressure eased inside Reggie's head, and he put his hands tenderly to his temples. The old noggin felt like an over-ripe squash, he thought nervously.

Uncle Ed was studying him

with a frozen little smile. "You're behaving very curiously," he said. Still smiling he put a foot on to a chair, rolled up his trouser cuff and removed a thin gleaming knife from a scabbard that was strapped to his leg. "Handy gadget," he said softly, and sauntered toward Reggie. Twirling the deadly little knife in his fingers, he stared clinically at Reggie's adam's apple. "Let me make myself perfectly clear," he said. "Unless you go through with this marriage I shall be forced to cut you into small strips. Do you understand? I don't approve of men who trifle with the affections of an innocent girl."

"Nor do I," Reggie said stoutly.

"Let us go," Der said. "Otherwise I'll blow your skull open. Quickly now."

It was a pretty sour pickle he was in, Reggie thought. If he went on and married Sari he would be the first headless bridegroom in history. But if he tried to take Der to California Uncle Ed would be on him with that frightful pig sticker. It was a decided mess.

And he had to make up his mind in a hurry. Fortunately, Reggie wasn't quite bright enough to be afraid. He regarded the prospects of having his head popped open and his throat cut with a sort of whimsical resignation. Had there been no other factors involved, he would have flipped a coin to settle the issue. But there was another factor. The simple business of loyalty. Reggie liked Der and he didn't like Uncle Ed. Also, Der was a long way from home, a stranger in town, and in a sense he was Reggie's guest. You just couldn't be cold to a bloke under those circumstances.

"I say, put that thing away," Reggie said to Uncle Ed. "I'm planning to marry Sari. Let's be off to the church, eh?"

"That's a wise idea," Uncle Ed said, bending to replace the stiletto.

Reggie calmly picked up a heavy silver-backed hair-brush from his dresser and slugged Uncle Ed at the base of the skull. Uncle Ed went down in an unsoldierly sprawl; his body stiffened at once into the posture of attention and held it.

"Very neat," Der said. "Now let's be on your way."

"Righto. California, eh? Longish trip, what?"

Reggie hurried into the living room and found Clive flicking a dust rag about with an air of aloof elegance.

"Clive, I just beaned Uncle Ed. Stand by with the old ice pack like a good chap."

"Very well, sir."

"I can't get married today. Got to go to California. Tell Sari. Tell her I love her."

"Very well, sir."

"Give her my best." Reggie paused, chewing on his lip. He realized dimly that he was inconveniencing her to some extent. "Tell her I'll bring her back something nice," he said, by way of amends.

"Yes sir."

And with that Reggie was off. Downstairs in the bright morning sunlight he hailed a cab. "California," he told the driver and settled back comfortably. "Really quite simple," he said to Der.

Then he realized the cab wasn't moving. The driver, a sorrowful-looking man with a shiny bald head, was looking back at him with narrowed eyes.

"What's that?" he said.

"California," Reggie said, glancing at his watch.

In some intuitive manner the cab driver realized that he was not dealing with a wise guy, a drunk, or a moron. He wasn't quite sure what he *was* dealing with, but he knew this was no ordinary type.

"Mister, I can't take you to California," he said. "It's too far. But I can take you to a train, or maybe an airplane. How about that?"

"Well, grand," Reggie said. "Let's make it the train, shall we? I think planes are a giant hoax. Fellow at my club told me that. The idea is preposterous, if you think about it. Tons of metal flying about in the air! Ridiculous what!" Reggie laughed pleasantly. "Well, off we go, eh?"

"Yes, mister," the driver said, taking a long breath.

But within the distance of a block Reggie came to grips with another problem. "Money," he muttered aloud.

"What's that?" Der said.

"We need money. Tickets, meals, hotels, all the rest of it." Reggie's tone was worried. Money was something he didn't understand at all. Trading bits of paper for things was a very unnerving business, if you thought about it. Any minute people might laugh at you, chase you away for attempting to trick them.

"Well, get some money," Der said impatiently.

"But where?"

"That's your problem."

Reggie stewed about it for awhile, rubbing his long jaw nervously. Only one thought filtered into his spongy brain; repair to the club, take up the problem with Ferdie. He told Der about this, got his okay, then changed his directions to the driver.

Ten minutes later he was in the blessed sanctuary of the men's bar, contentedly sipping a brandy milk punch with Ferdie. Ferdie took a dim view of Reggie's standing-up Sari.

"Caddish thing to do," he said, shaking his head.

"But I had to," Reggie said. "I still love her wildly. But I must go to California. That's why I came here."

"That doesn't follow," Ferdie said, pouncing on this non sequitur.

"I need a bit of the old ready for tickets, meals, all the rest of it," Reggie said.

"Hah!" Ferdie said in a bleak voice. "Money! I haven't seen any of the stuff for years. When I ask the old man for it he starts babbling about camels and eyes of needles and my getting into Heaven."

"Well, let's have a drink," Reggie said.

"Grand idea."

They had several drinks. Der became impatient; his voice was acquiring an ominous ring.

Finally Ferdie snapped his fingers. "You'll go out on the Super Chief, right?"

Reggie nodded hopelessly. "If I find some cash."

Ferdie began to laugh. "Don't need money. Something just occurred to me." His laugher rocketed about the room and several members departed in a rage. "The old man owns the Santa Fe," Ferdie said happily. "You see, *his* father wouldn't buy him an electric train years ago, so the old man bought himself a bunch of railroads when he came of age. I've got a pass on the road." He brought out a wallet, fumbled through a collection of cards until he came to one that was stamped and signed by the Santa Fe.

"Good anywhere, anytime," Ferdie said. "Take it, old man."

"I say, what luck," Reggie said. "Let's have a quick one for the road, eh?"

"For the *rail*road," Ferdie cried with a scream of laughter He pounded Reggie on the back. Reggie pounded him on the back.

The bartender stared at them with a bright and active dislike . . .

When Reggie got to the train he was in a mellow mood. The pass worked wonders. A conductor led him to a drawing room, begged him to think of himself as a guest of the road, and then tiptoed away, closing the door reverently behind him. Reggie

was tired from the emotional explosions of the day, and pleasantly numbed by half-a-dozen brandy milk punches. He stretched out on the bed, sighed comfortably and fell at once into a dreamless sleep.

The train was roaring along when he woke. Reggie was conscious of a slight hangover and acute hunger. Well, off to the diner, he thought. Guest of the road and all that. For a moment he looked at his clothes with a sceptical frown. Cutaway, striped trousers, spats, all pretty elegant. But it wasn't the right time of day for them. Finally hunger triumphed over his sartorial misgivings, and he shrugged and set off to find the diner.

Reggie's concern over his attire was needless. He had few accomplishments of any consequence, but he did wear clothes with elegant authority. He could have worn a bathing suit and got away with it.

The dining car was crowded but Reggie found a seat next to an elderly gentleman with a hearing aid. After a few polite bellows about the weather, he ordered a large dinner from the steward and settled back to stare at the passing scenery. His mood was less mellow now. He thought of Sari and sighed. How would he ever straighten this mess out? He sighed again and nibbled on a cracker. Might be best to enlist in the Foreign Legion. Come home thirty or forty years hence. He saw himself in a rakish uniform, limping slightly, hair streaked with silver, meeting Sari in some far-off, bitter-sweet future. They would talk sadly of what might have been, and he would dandle her child on his knee. No, her children would be too big for that. Maybe a little dog. He would tell Sari about the sacking of this or that place, the great battle that took place here or there. And they'd have a drink. Maybe half-a-dozen. Good stiff Scotches. Reggie began to feel better. Maybe they could start all over again, pleasantly tight. Get the filthy little dog off his knee straight away. Get Sari on his knee. That would be the maneuver. Have a few more drinks. Ask Ferdie over. Make a real party out of it. Reggie chuckled and nibbled another cracker. Why wait thirty or forty years? And to hell with that Legion nonsense. The thing to do was go straight back and put Sari firmly on his knee. Right!

He looked up, still smiling happily, and saw Sari's Uncle Ed enter the dining car.

For an instant he sat frozen, the grin fixed horribly on his face, while his heart leaped about in his chest like an imprisoned bullfrog.

Then Uncle Ed saw him.

"Har! Scoundrel!" he cried,

in a voice that might have teed-off a cavalry charge.

Reggie grabbed a fistful of crackers and ran for it. Uncle Ed made the tactical mistake of pausing to get the stiletto out from under his trouser leg, and when he straightened up Reggie had disappeared. With a bellow of rage Uncle Ed set after him.

Reggie ran through three cars like a nimble goat, aware of nothing but Uncle Ed's stiletto and the wild fury he had seen in the old fool's eyes. He knew Uncle Ed was gaining on him; his shouting voice was closer every second. The trouble was that Reggie's headlong flight was clearing the track for Uncle Ed. Finally Reggie skidded to a stop, jerked open the door of the nearest room, and hurled himself inside. He closed the door, put his back to it and closed his eyes.

Uncle Ed went roaring past, screeching like a banshee. The voice died away as he banged out of the doors at the end of the car.

"Whew!" Reggie said.

"Have we met?" another voice said coldly.

For a second Reggie thought Der had spoken. But when he opened his eyes he realized his mistake. There was a girl sitting in the seat by the window looking up at him with a very cold expression on her face.

"Why, hello there," Reggie said pleasantly.

"Would you mind telling me what you're doing in my room?"

"Not at all. It's a rather good yarn, as a matter of fact." Reggie sat down, crossed his legs and beamed at the girl. Sensible type he thought approvingly. "A few years back, I met a delightful girl named Sari," he began. "Well, one thing led to another and —"

"I don't want your autobiography, I just want you to clear out," the girl snapped. "Unless you leave immediately I'll ring for the conductor."

"No! If I go outside I'll be killed."

"What nonsense! Do you think this is the Orient Express?"

"I'm serious." Reggie caught her slim hands in his and sank to one knee. "There's a preposterous crackpot roaming about this train with a knife, and his only passion in life is to cut me into tiny pieces."

"What's he got against you?"

"Oh, it's a madly complicated business," Reggie said. "But I haven't done anything *wrong*."

Something changed in the girl's face. She looked a bit more interested now, and her eyes were softer. "Well, you don't look like the criminal type, I must say." She hesitated, then shrugged. "Stay here if you like for a while. Perhaps you can get off at the next stop."

"I say, that's good of you," Reggie said fervently.

The girl smiled slightly and looked out the window. Reggie settled back comfortably and let his heartbeat return to normal. They sat in silence for several minutes. The girl's profile was to Reggie and he was therefore able to study her in a clinical manner. And she was well worth studying! She had silky, blonde hair, a complexion like white satin, and wide baby-blue eyes. Her lower lip was gently swollen into a sensuous provocative pout. She wore a yellow silk dress that hugged the ripe luscious curves of her body as if it thoroughly enjoyed the job. Her legs were bare, lightly tanned and absolutely perfect.

But despite all these physical endowments she didn't look happy, Reggie thought.

The silence wore on, making him uncomfortable. Finally he said, "Is anything wrong?"

"Nothing you could help, I'm afraid."

"Oh, we mustn't strike the colors without a fight," Reggie said. "I'm good at cheering people up. Let's give it a try."

"You don't know who I am?"

"Well — no."

"I'm Mona Maxwell."

"Reggie van Ameringen."

She sighed. "I'm an actress. Lots of people would know who I am. Or maybe they wouldn't. You've never heard of me?"

"I'm sorry," Reggie said.

"Well, maybe you're the kind of guy I should talk to," she said, studying him with a bit more interest. "You're outside the racket, and maybe you've got a fresh slant on things. The thing is, my quote career unquote is going to hell because I'm not a lady."

"What an absurd idea!"

She let him have a grateful

little smile. "That's sweet, but don't kid me. I know what I am. And that's the trouble. I can do only one thing, and that's the Dead End Kids sort of work. And there's no demand for it right now. But there is a wonderful part open in a picture they're doing at Magnum, and that's what I'm going back to take a crack at. Maurice Mann, the big boss at Magnum, is willing to let me test for it, but the director is unsold on me. He doesn't think he can teach me to act like a lady, and that's what the part needs. A lady. Fancy me as a pure-bred little debutante?" She laughed shortly and shook her head. "It's crazy."

"Ladies are ladies," Reggie said. "One doesn't *act* like a lady. One is a lady." He settled back, clasping his hands about a bony knee. "This director must be a priceless ass. Supposing you teach a man to act like a horse. Make him paw the ground and whinny. Does that make him a horse? No, he's still a man acting like a horse. Same with ladies. Dogs. Trout. Really, it's frightfully simple, don't you see?"

"But how about manners, and stuff like that? Knowing the right fork, saying the right thing. That's where I get caught with my breeding down. The wrong side of the tracks is always getting into the act."

"My dear girl, you mustn't worry about things like that," Reggie said gently. Here was a sweet and earnest little thing, he thought, being bothered by an absolute lot of nonsense. "Take this fork business for instance," he went on, determined to sweep away her anxieties. "Ghastly bore, really. Knives, forks, spoons, stretching stupidly out on either side of your plate. By the time you get to the end of them you're in your dinner partner's soup."

"I know," she said sadly. "And you never know which one to use."

"Oh, rot. Give you a good tip on that. Friend of mine named Ferdie told me about this one. You'd like him," Reggie said warmly. "He's a grand chap. Anyway, here's his little trick. There you are facing a square yard of cutlery, all of it smug and shining. Knives are the worst, you know. Very smug, actually. Well, let's say it's soup time. You don't know what spoon to take. Well, you don't take *any* of them. Got that?"

"Don't take any of them?"

"That's right. You stare at them with a fishy eye, and keep your hands in your lap. After a bit the hostess will start to squirm. Let her squirm. Serves her right. Then she'll give the eye to the butler, and he'll come padding up behind you. 'Is something wrong, sir' he will whisper. Then you

say in a cold, stony voice, "If it's not *too* much trouble, may I have a clean soup spoon?' That will do it. He'll pop back with a clean spoon, which you examine very, very carefully, and then you go on with dinner."

She began to laugh. "Oh, you're not serious," she said.

"Ferdie does it all the time. And he's got another trick, too. He picks up all the cutlery, one piece at a time, and gives its the fishy eye. Then he selects just one of them and eats the whole meal with it. *That* little maneuver puts an end to this nonsense about which fork to use. You use the *clean* one, that's all."

"You make it all sound so funny," she said. "I don't think I'll ever worry about knives and forks again. Go on, tell me some more."

"Well, none of it's important," Reggie said. "Just have a good time, be yourself. If you meet stinkers, well be a little stinker yourself. Take dukes. Dukes are usually stinkers. Don't know why. But it works that way. So you meet the Duke of Blenheim. He looks down his nose at you, mutters something you can't understand. Frightful manners. All dukes act that way. Well now. You smile at him and say, 'Jove, I've always wanted to meet the Duke of Blandings.' He raises his eyebrows and says, 'I say, old chap, I'm the Duke of *Blenheim.*' Then you stare at him. For a longish bit of time. Then you say, 'Oh!' That's all. Not another word. Then stroll off. Ten to one he'll be after you like a shot to have you for week-ends of grouse hunting. It always works."

"Tell me," she said smiling, "do you use these gags?"

"Well, no. But Ferdie does. All the time."

"Why don't you?"

Reggie blushed. "Well, they're not really very kind," he said shyly.

Mona Maxwell regarded him in silence for a few seconds and then she leaned forward and kissed him full on the lips.

"You're kind of goofy," she said, drawing back from him, "but you're the sweetest guy I ever met.

"It's very good of you to say so," Reggie said, touched.

Mona took one of his hands and patted it in a friendly manner. "Look, Reggie, I'm going to make you a very un-ladylike proposition. How about staying here with me until we get to the coast? You can help me a lot, I know it. Somehow you give me confidence. You make all these things that worry me seem kind of funny and silly. Won't you do it, please?"

Reggie thought of Uncle Ed prowling about the train with his stiletto. "Delighted," he said,

smiling. "I want to cooperate."

She looked away from him, coloring slightly. "I shouldn't say this, I guess, being that I'm such a perfect lady and you're such a perfect gent, but you don't have — well, anything else in mind, do you?"

Reggie looked at her in alarm. "Don't get the wrong idea about ladies and gentlemen. If you're confused about that, I shall have to tell you where little ladies and little gentlemen come from."

"Oh, I know all about that," she said. "I was just thinking of us, specifically."

"Well, that's better," Reggie said, relieved. "No, I have nothing in mind but convincing you that this director is a frightful fool." He patted her hand. "You're a very real lady, my dear. And now let's order dinner, shall we?" . . .

Thirty-six hours later Reggie strode briskly into the sunny brilliance of the Los Angeles station. Der had become active again now they were nearing his destination. However, there had been a change in his manner. He had dropped his dictatorial brusqueness.

"We're close to the exact spot where I must meet the machine," he said excitedly. "Let's get a cab. I can tell you how to direct the driver."

"Very well."

They commandeered a cab and presently were bowling out of Los Angeles toward Hollywood.

"You've been a good sport about this," Der said. "I'm sorry about messing up all your plans."

"Well, it's done and that's that," Reggie said philosophically.

"— Er — that girl," Der said. "Quite attractive, I thought. By your standards, of course," he added hastily. "On Mars, she would seem very weird."

"I daresay."

"Oh, of course. I wouldn't look twice at her on Mars."

"I shouldn't imagine so."

"Tell me," Der said plaintively, "Are you people getting anywhere with inter-planetary travel. You know, space ships, things like that?"

"I'm sure I wouldn't know."

"Hmmmm! Well, if anything breaks in that line, why don't you come up for a visit?"

"Well, that's very good of you," Reggie said, touched. "I'll remember it."

Der laughed casually. "You might bring Miss Maxwell, too. She seemed very fond of you."

"We might work it out," Reggie said. "Sounds like a rum time."

"Wonderful!" Der said happily.

After a while they drew up before a great iron gate at which a uniformed guard was stationed. Visible through the gates were a

series of white buildings gleaming in the brilliant sun. And high above the gate was a sign that read: Magnum Studios!

"This is it, we're very close," Der said.

Reggie paid the driver (with money Mona had thoughtfully insisted he take) and approached the guard. Der was figuratively jumping with excitement by now. "We must go inside. There, that big window in the central building. That's where I must go."

"Righto," Reggie said.

The guard strolled to meet him, smiling pleasantly.

"Do you have a pass?" he asked.

"Well, no," Reggie said. "But this is terribly important. We've got to get inside. You see that big window in the central building? That's where we go."

"Oh, *that's* where you want to go," the guard said, rocking on his heels. "By any chance do you know whose office that is?"

"Well, no."

"That's Mr. Maurice Mann's office. He just happens to own this studio."

"Well, I'm sure he enjoys that," Reggie said. "What're our chances, old chap?"

"Your chances? Well, let's see now," the guard said reflectively. "Supposing you walked up to the White House and said that you wanted to see President Eisenhower. What do you think your chances would be?"

Reggie shrugged. "Longish, I imagine."

"Well, they'd be very good compared to your chances of seeing Mr. Mann," the guard said, shaking his head.

A horn sounded behind them, and he said, "Run along now, I'm busy. Sorry."

Reggie turned away dejectedly as a Rolls Royce pulled up beside him and stopped. Mona Maxwell put her blonde head out the rear window, and yelled, "Reggie! What are you doing here?"

Reggie wheeled about. "What luck!" he said.

"Look at that beautiful hair," Der said softly.

"Down, old chap," Reggie said. He hurried to the side of the car, and said, "Look, old dear, can you get us into Maurice Mann's office?"

" 'Us' " Mona said, frowning. "Where's your friend?"

"I mean me," Reggie said. "It's frightfully important."

"But of course. Hop in. I'm going to see him right now."

"Ripping." Reggie climbed into the car and tossed the guard a sprightly salute as they rolled into the lot. Five minutes later they entered the presence of Maurice Mann, after passing through three outer offices in which secretaries were busily engaged in polishing their nails.

Maurice Mann was a tall, powerfully built man with a mas-

sive bald head. He walked around his desk, which took him almost a full minute, and embraced Mona with a paternal hug.

"Grand to have you back home, darling," he said heartily.

Mona introduced Reggie and Maurice Mann squeezed his fingers mightily. "Grand to have you back home," he said heartily.

Der said, "Under his desk, that's where I meet the machine. It's waiting for me now. Under his desk, quickly."

Just then there was a violent commotion outside the door of Mann's office. Voices were raised suddenly and angrily, and a woman screamed. The door burst open and Uncle Ed charged into the room, stiletto raised to strike. And behind him were Clive and Sari, imperturbable and distraught respectively.

"We've trailed you like bloodhounds, by God," Uncle Ed shouted.

"Oh, Reggie, what's happened to you!" Sari cried.

"I have a change of clothes, sir," Clive said quietly.

Uncle Ed advanced on Reggie as Maurice Mann began to bellow for producers, directors, writers and finally, the police.

Reggie hurled himself under Mann's cavernous desk, and as he did he felt a sudden booming explosion within his head. The concussion knocked him cold, but before he blacked out he heard Der say, "So long, old man. It was pleasant." . . .

Then, hours later, it seemed, he was pulled out from beneath the desk and hoisted to his feet. The tableau, he saw gloomily, hadn't changed. Everyone was still babbling wildly, and Uncle Ed still brandished the nasty pig sticker.

But then, over the noisy confusion, Clive's voice fell like a bar of iron. "Drop that foolish knife, and drop it instantly," he said, with enough volume to set the ashtrays on Mann's desk bouncing musically.

Uncle Ed let the knife fall from his hand, and then he slowly straightened to attention. His eyes were fixed immovably on a spot about two inches to the right of Clive's ear.

"I was once a Guards' Officer," Clive said apologetically to Reggie. "And I remembered this chap at last. Painful as it is for me to say so, sir, he was one of the least efficient kitchen orderlies in my company. The men called him Greasy Eddie, if my memory serves. Stand at ease," he said to Uncle Ed in a kinder voice.

"Thank you, sir," Uncle Ed said. He looked miserably at Sari. "I always wanted to be a soldier, but I wasn't much of one. And when I got pensioned off, I started to act the part."

It was then that Maurice Mann exploded in earnest. "Get out,

get out, all of you," he shouted. "I don't want madmen and idiots crawling under my feet. You too, Mona, clear out of here."

Reggie stared at him coldly. "That is the not the way to address a lady," he said.

Mona caught Maurice Mann's arm, and said coaxingly, "Relax, please. This is all in fun. Reggie here has been a great friend of mine."

"Well, all right, all right," Maurice Mann said testily. He looked down his nose at Reggie and muttered something inaudible.

Reggie smiled boyishly, and gave Mona a fleeting wink.

"I say, this is a pleasure," he said. "I've always wanted to meet Maurice Manning."

"I happen to be Maurice *Mann*."

"Oh!" Reggie said.

There was a long silence. Then he turned to Sari and took her arm. "Come along, my dear. I've got a good, longish story to tell you."

"I'm sure it's going to be long, at least," she said, smiling.

They were almost at the door before Maurice Mann caught up with them. "Look, I suppose I've behaved pretty crudely," he said earnestly.

Reggie waved a hand negligently. "I daresay," he murmured.

"Wouldn't you like to look around the studio, and then come back here for lunch? Really, I'd be pleased if you would."

"I'd love to," Sari said.

"Well, all right then," Reggie said pleasantly, and winked once more at Mona Maxwell. She was too much the lady to laugh, of course.

And in the dark caves outside the city of Dar, Der sat in the center of a spellbound group, talking urgently to them as the winds clawed up and down the sides of the black chamber.

"And her hair was the color of the starlight you see in the early morning," he was saying . . .

He had been talking for quite some time now, but no one was bored.

●

WHAT Art was to the ancient world, Science is to the modern.
— Benjamin Disraeli

WHAT A MAN BELIEVES

By Robert Sheckley

Man is endowed with free will; but after death — the reckoning. What will it be? Man has forever pondered the price of a sin and the value of a good deed in the final auditing beyond the grave. We hope the good in us will weigh heavily, but we fear that our sinfulness will bear us down. Hope — our greatest comfort. And now Robert Sheckley tells us it can be our ultimate punishment.

"You must forgive me," Mr. Archer said, his lips peeled back in a grin. "I shouldn't be smiling — smirking." He laughed out loud, high-pitched. "But it'll take a moment. I just hadn't expected — even on my deathbed —"

"Of course," the man behind the desk said. He smiled encouragingly. In the tremendous room there was only Mr. Archer, the desk he stood before, and the man who sat behind it. The ceiling of the room was a soaring, limitless arch, as far above Archer's head as the blue sky had seemed when he was alive. The walls were misty, far-away things. And in the center of it all, there he was — Edward Moran Archer.

"A very usual reaction, I assure you," the man behind the desk said, looking down at the lapels of his suit to give Archer time to straighten his face.

"We make allowances for it. Your present age of sophistication is wary of anthropomorphisms, such as this. People are no longer raised in the belief of a heaven and a hell; they view such things as convenient fictions for the preachers and writers. Naturally, when they die and find themselves catapulted into the one or the other, the reaction is hysteria. Some cry. Others laugh."

"I see," Mr. Archer said. He had himself under control now,

Henry C. Pitz

but a grin was still tugging at the corners of his broad mouth. "Well, I haven't been a particularly good chap. Broke a number of the ten commandments, including the more serious ones. Where's your fire and brimstone?" He pursed his lips, because the grin was threatening to crack any moment. Imagine! After all, he was going to be burned in a good old-fashioned hell of the sort his grandfather had described in such loving detail. But he still couldn't take it seriously. The situation was so bizarre, so basically humorous.

"Do you *want* fire and brimstone?" the man behind the desk asked.

"Not particularly," Mr. Archer said. "Is there any choice?"

"Of course!" the man told him, looking very un-diabolical in his neat gray business suit, with his smoothly combed hair. "Free will is manifest in the universe — even here. You have many alternatives to choose among."

"Different punishments?" Archer asked. "A choice of the thumbscrews or the iron maiden? The rack or the hot irons?"

"All those come under a single category," the man behind the desk said. "Allow me to show you."

Instantly, Archer discovered himself to be a disembodied intellect. He was in a small, low-ceilinged room. The only light was provided by smoking torches, which threw jagged streaks of red and yellow across the stone walls.

Poesque, Archer thought, and complimented himself on his coolness.

In the center of the room was a tableau. A man, a single rag wrapped around his loins, was stretched across a great wheel, his body drawn tight as a taut bowstring. His tormenters, motionless, were on either side of him. One held a hot iron, a bare fraction of an inch from the flesh. Another was tightening an iron boot to his foot while still another had his hand on the lever that moved the wheel; and all were frozen in mid-action.

The faces of the tormenters were hooded and dark; the man's agonized face was turned to the ceiling, and all Archer could see was the white line of his jaw and corded neck. He strained his eyes to catch a movement, but for long seconds could make out none. Then he noticed that, imperceptibly, the rack was being drawn tighter; the boot was being screwed on the foot, the steaming iron coming closer, searing the flesh by degrees so gradual as to be imperceptible.

The scene vanished.

"Not laughing now?" the man behind the desk asked in a friendly tone.

Archer shook his head.

"We show that scene first. There's nothing like a little good old-fashioned torture to sober a man up. Of course, they say that no physical torment can compare to the psychological, and I believe it is true. Still, for those who can't stand the others, we *do* have the torture chambers."

"You said there were other choices?" Archer asked. He caught himself shuddering. Physical torture — it had always terrified him. Ever since he had been a little boy. Even the thought of being hurt — a splintered arm, a blasted leg . . .

"Of course there are others," the man said. "And you may choose any one of them. Allow me to present the selection."

Archer's mind was immediately in space, moving in on the side of a mountain. He came in closer, and saw a dot on the white stone face. The dot resolved itself into a man.

Standing beside him in spirit, Archer watched him climb. He moved slowly, carefully, up the sheer face of the cliff. There was barely a handhold on the smooth rock, hardly a single roughness to give purchase. Like a giant ant, the man struggled on.

Looking up, Archer could see that the top of the mountain was wreathed in mist. There was mist below, covering the bottom. Between the two mists was sheer, bare rock, and the climbing man.

The man moved upward, and Archer saw that he *must* move up, or slip down. And once started, there would be nothing to break the descent.

Would he fall, Archer wondered, watching him cling to the rock, scrambling for a grip. Or would he win through to the top? Archer watched, and felt a surge of sympathy grow within him. "Beat them!" he shouted through silent lips. "Get there!"

And the scene vanished.

"A variation," the man behind the desk said, "On the theme of Sisyphus. But instead of a stone, the man pulls himself."

"What happens when he reaches the top?" Archer asked, feeling better already. The mountain was a far better alternative to the torture, he thought, leaning against the desk.

"To tell you the truth," the man said, "It has never been definitely established that the mountain *has* a top. Although I suppose it has."

"No top?" Archer breathed. He stood erect, suddenly. "You mean that the man will just climb and climb — for all eternity?"

"I never said it had no top. I just mentioned that it has never been definitely established. As for climbing and climbing, he will climb, yes. Unless he wishes to let go, in which case he will fall. And eternity is one of your sophistications which I, personally, have no

belief in. There is no proof of it."

The next scene was a boat on an ocean. The water was gray, and the waves were gray, with no whitecaps. In front of the little boat was a wall of gray mist; behind it and on all sides was gray water, stretching as far as the eye could see.

There was a man in the mastless little boat, sitting at the helm, staring into the mist. The boat moved gently, over the gray waves, into the mist which retreated in front of it.

"Pleasant, eh?" the man behind the desk asked, when the scene disappeared. "Romantic, isn't it? A ship at sea, the mysterious water."

"I suppose the ocean has no end?" Archer said wryly, feeling he had caught on to the place.

"I don't know," the man said. "The ocean undoubtedly has an end somewhere. But it is entirely possible that the boat is moving in gigantic circles."

"And he'll never find out," Archer said.

"He expects to," the man told him. "If he has faith, he thinks that just beyond the wall of mist may be the shore. A mile, a dozen miles, a hundred miles. Or only a few yards."

"Show me more," Archer said. "I'm catching on."

There was a small, well-lighted room with a closed door in one wall. A conveyor belt ran through an opening, across the room, and out another opening. A man stood in front of the belt, putting bolts in the mechanisms that rode past. His work wasn't difficult; every second a part would come by, he would slip a bolt into it, and wait for the next.

"The influence of the machine age," the man said. "It suits some."

"When the last bolt is in, he's finished?"

"Right."

"But," Archer said, "The conveyor belt is endless. And someone — some other victim, perhaps, has the job of taking out the bolts; at a different part of the belt." Archer permitted himself a sour smile. He had the place figured out, exactly as he had figured out every place he had ever been in his life; every place except the hospital, that is, where no amount of money would give him a new heart.

"Why doesn't he go through that door?" Archer asked. "Is it locked?"

"No, there are no locked doors here. But he must not leave his work. The door is there when he is finished."

"The old anticipation game," Archer said. "Keep them hoping, keep them thinking it's going to be all right in the end. Clever devils!"

"It may well be," the man behind the desk said. He looked at the lapels of his suit until Archer had stopped smiling. "But I, personally, don't know."

There were other things; ingenious things, amazing things, even terrifying things. Archer saw the choice of the ancients; a clearing in a forest where a man could stand, sword in hand. Then, through the trees, a gigantic wolf would bound forth. With one sweep — evidently he was in practice — the man would cut down the wolf. Mortally wounded, the animal would drag itself away. The man would stand, sword poised, listening. Some barely perceptible sound — the rustle of a twig, the pounding of a heart — would give the warning, and he would turn at the instant another wolf leaped through the trees from a different point. And cut him down, and wait for another.

"It would be amusing," Archer said, "If it were the same wolf, over and over again."

"But it may not be," the man reminded him. "There may well be a number of foes to kill — a hundred, a thousand, a million. He may someday reach the end of them, and be able to continue through the forest to his destiny."

"Or he may not," Archer said sardonically. "Especially if it *is* the same wolf. As you and I know."

The man shrugged his shoul-

ders. "That is not my concern. Faith, or the lack of it, is not for me. You have seen — choose!"

Psychological torture, Archer mused. Wasn't it always that way? Wasn't hell just another way of keeping the other fellow anticipating, hoping, waiting? So that was how it was. Well then.

But what idiot, he wondered, would choose the torture chamber? A masochist, perhaps? A man like himself, who saw through the eternity of anticipation? Oh, no!

The mountain? Strenuous, to say the least. And so stupid, as was the conveyor belt. The swordsman's lot was a little better, but who wanted to spend eternity stabbing wolves? With the possibility that one might be a trifle careless, and get bitten in the process.

The others were no better.

"I believe the boat is the best thing," Archer said. "So if you haven't any —"

Instantly he was in a small boat, sailing over a gray sea, into a mist.

Damn! There were some more questions he wanted to ask. Well, no matter; he might as well settle down to spend eternity comfortably.

After a while he looked over the boat. There was nothing to see. No ropes, no rudder, no provisions. Just a wooden hull and himself. There was enough room to lie down, though, and he did so. Perhaps he could sleep.

With a gray, expressionless sky over him, the gray sea under him, and the gray boat on all sides, Archer slept.

He awoke, to find the same sea and sky, the same boat and mist.

He wasn't hungry or thirsty. Reaching down with his hand, he felt the water. It was real water. He tasted it. Salt. An ocean of tears? He settled down to wait.

Time passed, and he reviewed his situation. Anticipation was the key to the torture, he was sure. For all eternity he was supposed to peer into the mist, waiting, expecting the shore to come any minute, dark against the gray water. But he resolved not to think of it. It was absurd to hold hopes in this place.

Perhaps he should have chosen something else, he thought, after a time. There was no denying that the boat ride was monotonous. At least, lopping off heads or putting in bolts he would have something to do.

Archer reviewed his life. He went over it in minute detail, reliving every moment, stretching it out. Grimly he reviewed the steps that had brought him here, the many crossroads in his life. He thought about everything, the good, the bad and the indifferent.

In a way, he was glad that many decisions had brought him

to this place. It gave him much to think about.

Time passed, unnoticed on the sea, the advancing boat, the retreating mist.

Thought ran on.

Time passed, and Archer lay or sat or stood in the boat, feeling as human as ever, except that he was never hungry or thirsty. But bored!

So much time passed that it seemed as though eternity must be starting over again. Archer had exhausted every thought, every combination and permutation of thought that he was capable of. And nothing changed in the gray boat, or on the gray sea, or in the gray mist.

Time passed.

Slowly . . .

TIME PASSED!

"This is too much," Archer said out loud again. He had been talking aloud for some time.

"I can't stand this," he repeated. For the ten millionth time he speculated on what was in the water. What dangers? What horrors?

Time passed.

"But I think I can go overboard." After thinking about it for the billionth time, Archer lowered himself over the side of the boat into the gray sea. He had long considered how it would feel, the water lapping around him, the thoughts it would bring, and the thoughts *they* would bring.

For a moment it was wonderful. He paddled, keeping himself up in the water, watching the boat continue without him. Then something happened.

Ahead, the mists parted. The boat cleaved through them, and there was the shore, long and dark on the horizon. Archer could make out trees, a beach. The boat sped on, and grounded itself. Archer saw the shapes of other boats, and thought he glimpsed people.

"There was an end!" he gasped. "The boat wasn't going in circles!"

And the climber — Archer knew that he had reached the top of his mountain, if he had the courage to go on long enough. And the worker had placed his last bolt, and the swordsman killed his last wolf.

All, a test of faith! Faith, in hell!

He struck out for the shore, but the water was like thick jelly, weighing down his arms and legs, keeping his head below the surface. He took one last, despairing look at the shore, and began to sink.

Of course he couldn't drown. Not once dead. All he could do was sink, and sink, and sink. To where? To the bottom.

And what would be waiting for him on the bottom? Why, for those without faith or hope —

The torture chamber, of course.

FROM THIS DARK MIND

BY ROG PHILLIPS

To date, Science has made only minor attacks against Man's last haven of solitude — the privacy of his innermost mind. But your mind is a goal, and Science is a tireless worker who hammers relentlessly against all doors. And if this last door is finally opened, and your deepest subconscious laid bare to the probing electric eye of the robot psychiatrist, then will you truly stand naked.

HOUSE!" the polyanalyzer said.

"Home!" the patient, a rather plain blonde, said, too quickly — almost defensively.

A little white dot on the desk lit up. Dr. Hugo Bard put the phone to his face. The mouthpiece was form fitting to keep the sound out of the ears of his patients.

"Mr. David Green just canceled his appointment for today. He has the flu."

"Get me his M.D., Nancy."

"Fear!" said the polyanalyzer.

". . . ? Fear . . ." said the patient vaguely.

"Coat!"

"Fu- Mink!!"

"Water."

"Mud."

"Hello, Dr. Allan. This is Hugo Bard. I understand David Green has the flu."

"Yes. Glad you called, Hugo. Didn't know he was a patient of yours."

"I know. You M.D.s should stop being twentieth century and cross-index. Do you mean he has the flu or the symptoms?

"The symptoms, of course. Including a temperature of 101.4."

"That's bad," Hugo Bard said gravely. "I'd suggest you re-

Illustrator: Dave Stone

diagnose and come up with pneumonia. Hospitalization and fever induction for three days."

"I don't think it's warranted, Hugo," Dr. Allan said uneasily.

"Do you want me to get a Hearing on it?"

"No. No, I'll do it."

"At once. Rush over to his house. Tell him the lab tests brought it out. Be alarmed about it. It'll gratify him. Call me when his temperature is a hundred and five and three tenths."

"Papa," the polyanalyzer said.

"Poker — fireplace poker."

"Cold."

"Hot."

"Bright."

"Green!"

"Death."

"Suicide."

"Fresh."

"Eggs."

Hugo Bard shut off the polyanalyzer. "No, just lie there, Mary."

The patient relaxed, closing her eyes.

Hugo Bard lit a cigarette. In a moment the polyanalyzer typewriter began typing out the daily diagnosis sheet. Hugo's eyes followed the words as they materialized on the paper. When the typewriter stopped, he picked up the phone.

"Get me Mary's husband, Nancy. He'll be at work."

He smoked while he waited. The patient seemed to be asleep. The white dot glowed brightly.

"Hello? George Davis? This is Dr. Bard. The reason I called is that your wife is in immediate need of mental surgery."

"Mental surgery? What's that?"

"Nothing serious. She will be hospitalized and placed under drugs that lay her mind completely open. The factors that have brought on her present condition slipped past the public school psychodiagnosticians, as such things so often do. We must lift them out and plant a corrective lie."

"Gee. I don't know. We can't afford hospital right now. I know the insurance pays the bills, but — it would take someone to care for the kids when I'm at work . . ."

"If she had pneumonia would you force her to cook your meals?" Hugo Bard asked.

"No. Of course not."

"This is worse than pneumonia. I'm sorry I can't tell you how bad, but mental surgery is necessary. She should go from here to the hospital. Can you get off work and come to my office right now?"

"Oh — okay."

"One more thing. Do you agree with hospitalization? It will be for three days, and she won't know what happened."

"All right. I guess you know best. Go ahead with it."

Hugo flicked the phone bar.

"Nancy? Get the hospital. Reserve a private room for Mrs. Davis. Now. Yes. An ambulance after her husband gets here. Send Mable in with the pre-hospital hypo. Five c.c.'s."

A moment later the starched nurse entered with the hypo on a tray, with swabs and alcohol.

"Nothing to worry about, Mary," Hugo Bard soothed. "Just something to relax you a little more for the next test." He was already swabbing a spot on her arm. The needle stabbed in, the five cubic centimeters of white fluid disappeared into her bloodstream. "Close your eyes and relax. We'll go to work again in a few minutes, Mary."

Hugo left the office with Mable. In the gleaming lab room she poured him a cup of black-as-ink coffee. "You look scared," she said.

He shook his head slowly. "The things we uncover! That patient in there — Thank God for the polyanalyzer or sometimes I would think my work was getting me. Of course, it could be getting the poly, too. Sometimes I think I was born in the wrong century. It would be so nice to live in the twentieth century with its crimes and insanity."

"Or the fourteenth, with its plagues and surgeons with unsterilized knives?" Mable said, smiling.

Hugo grinned. "They had those in the eighteenth and nineteenth, too. And don't forget that up until 2023 a surgeon could operate without being required to consult the patient's psychologist." He frowned. "The M.D.'s still don't like us. They still like to believe they're top dogs. This coffee is good. Will you marry me, Mable?"

"I'll ask my husband if it's okay," Mable said.

"Come to think of it, my wife's the jealous type. Begun when she was a year and a half. Another baby was put in the crib with her and accidentally jiggled one of her rattles. Her response was to grab it away. First success to a budding behavior pattern . . ."

"Give her mental surgery," Mable said. "Make her relive it and convince her she missed the rattle and hurt her finger."

"It's a thought," Hugo Bard said. "By the way, I ought to run you through the poly. You might be harboring ideas about murdering my patients so I could spend more time with you back here." He leered knowingly. "Have you ever thought of loading the needles with poison?"

Mable blinked. "What do you suppose that five c.c.'s was you just poured into Mrs. Davis's vein?" Her eyes twinkled. "Better have your head examined, doc."

"I let my barber do that. Only costs two dollars —"

Nancy stuck her head in

through the door. "Dr. Allan is on the phone."

Hugo lifted his eyebrows in surprise. "I'll take it in my office."

Mary Davis was snoring softly on the couch. Even so, Hugo Bard was careful to keep his voice hidden in the phone.

"Yes, Dr. Allan?"

"It's about David Green. Last time I'll play second fiddle to a psychodiagnostician. He refused to accept my amended diagnosis and has gone to see another doctor. He refused to say which one he was going to, so we're stuck."

"I'm sorry, Allan. It's my fault. I should have hospitalized him for psychosurgery a week ago. I still don't know why though! The reason I didn't was that he is entering the composite high. His actions should have remained sane at this time. *Something* gave him the flu, however."

Dr. Allan's voice was testy. "Naturally. There are eighteen identified strains of virus, any one of which could have done it."

"And," Hugo's voice became just as testy, "if the flu was *caused* by the virus, everyone in the world would have it all the time. There's no immunity to flu."

"Then," Dr. Allan said, his voice edged with sarcasm, "what *did* cause his flu?"

"One of three things, I'm afraid. He's afraid of revealing a past violence, a current situation which he will solve by violence, or he has criminal knowledge connected with someone. We should have better cooperation. If you M.D.'s would only realize that all your patients should have psychodiagnosis —"

"I don't agree with your theories. What about the epidemics? The flu epidemic of last fall, for example? Most of my cases were children under ten years of age!"

"The cause of that epidemic was quite clear cut, if you'll remember, Dr. Allan. It began when Orphan Annie was legally adopted by the sinister Dr. Fey. Anxiety neurosis. As soon as we realized the specific cause and notified the comic strip syndicate, Warbucks came into the picture and managed to prove the adoption was illegal, freeing Annie. But you M.D.'s let over fifty children die of the flu because you *can't break out of the twentieth century*. I'm going to call the Bureau and see if I can't get a general alarm out on David Green. He has the potentialities for murder."

When he hung up, the white dot blinked brightly. "Mr. Davis is here," Nancy said.

"I'll talk to him in my other consultation office. Show him in. I'll be there in five minutes. First, get the Bureau on the phone for me. Dr. Arden."

When Dr. Arden, president of

the A.M.A. local answered, Hugo quickly sketched the picture, concluding with, "What I want is for all the ones he might go to to be contacted and asked to diagnose him as —"

"I realize what you want. Sorry. I'd like to, but we don't have the personnel to do that. Good lord, man, do you realize what an enormous task it would be to contact five thousand doctors in one afternoon? Let alone ask them to give a wrong diagnosis! If you're so sure, why not try the police?"

"It would disturb the patient. Anyway, the police wouldn't cooperate on anything so nebulous."

"I understand your problem there," Dr. Arden said. "It has to start sometime though. I'd suggest you contact them. Present your case. They'll turn you down, but they'll remember. Then if your patient does do something, you can remind them. A few thousand similar instances and they'll start cooperating."

"It's an angle. I'll do it. Thanks, Dr. Arden."

Hugo Bard hung up and went into his other office. George Davis was a short husky man. A steel worker at Bethlehem. Not too intelligent, but well adjusted to his body-type and station in life. Proud, innately kind, patient.

"I need your signature on some papers, Mr. Davis. There's nothing too seriously wrong with your wife, but she will be infinitely happier and much better adjusted with some minor mental surgery."

"But I don't want anything done that's going to change her any, doc. She's just a little upset."

Hugo smiled. "Did you ever beat her until she was genuinely sorry for something she did?"

"No! Has she been telling you that? I've never so much as slapped her — although sometimes it's been hard not to." George Davis grinned.

Dr. Bard answered his grin. "I think I'll explain just what's wrong, and show you how simple it will be to correct it. It won't be too accurate a picture, because I know only the arrows pointing toward it now. Under psychosurgery it will all come out and be altered.

"She has been searching for the father she wanted and didn't have."

"What's wrong with her dad? I know him. One of the finest."

"I know that. Too fine. I know one specific instance so far. He went into the living room to discipline Mary about something when she was thirteen. She flared up, grabbed the fireplace poker, and threw it at him. It missed him by less than an inch, and made a deep dent in the wall. She remembers that he turned pale. Then he turned and went out without saying another word.

Neither of them mentioned it ever again.

"Now this is what mental surgery will do. It will make her relive that experience, then it will be distorted for her, element by element, until it lies in her unconscious mind in a much different version. The new version will be that she picked up the poker, her father leaped quickly and took it away from her, then spanked her unmercifully, speaking to her very sternly. Isn't that simple?"

"Yes, but what good will it do? I mean . . ."

"There's more to it than that. You'll see by the results."

"I hope so. There's a guy at work that had mental surgery. He's one of the foremen now. Nice guy."

Nancy brought in the papers. Dr. Bard gave George Davis a pen to sign them. George scrawled his signature, then looked up. "Can I see Mary before . . ."

"She's in the next room. She's had the pre-hospital shot, a mild opiate to make her sleep."

"I want to see her anyway. Damn it —!" George Davis's lip quivered.

"I know, George," Hugo said quietly. "But you're true twenty-first."

"Damn right I am. We were headed toward a break-up. She didn't want it and I didn't want it, and we didn't know what was wrong. Only I wish it had been me."

"Not a thing wrong with you, George," Hugo Bard said.

"Like heck. You psycho-diagnosti-cians — by gosh I said it that time! — have a lot to learn yet."

Nancy came in. "The ambulance is here," she said.

"Good. You can go with her to the hospital if you like, George. She won't wake up though. Not for three days. You'll have to take it on the chin. And when she wakes up she won't seem different, but in a month or two you'll begin to see lots of difference. If you'll excuse me . . ."

Ten minutes later he was on the phone to the chief of police. After listening to him the police chief said, "Are you willing to sign a warrant for his arrest? If not we can't do a thing for you."

"If I told you," Hugo Bard said, "that I overheard two men making plans to rob a bank at eleven o'clock tomorrow, would you have men there, just in case?"

"Probably. I see what you're driving at. When the city fathers hand down orders that you medics can forecast crime I'll help you. Until then I can't do a thing — unless you sign a warrant."

"What's your name, captain?"

"O'Conner. Jim O'Conner. You have me interested. I can't do a thing, Dr. Bard, but — let me

know, please, how it comes out."

Nancy had been listening. She came into the office with a disgusted look. "Strictly twentieth century," she snorted.

"I wouldn't say so," Hugo said mildly. "He was interested. And he doesn't run the police department with an independent hand. He has to answer to his bosses. I think I'll discuss this at the next meeting. All of us psychodiagnosticians should be more police conscious. It would pay off eventually. What's on the books? This should have been David Green's two hours."

"Mrs. Garson at four," Nancy said.

Hugo made a wry face. "She has an inpenated mind — and lots of money."

"Inpenated?" Nancy blinked.

"Not in the dictionary. Look up inclavated and draw your own conclusions. I'm going to run over to the hospital and get Mary started. Be back at four."

When Dr. Hugo Bard stepped out of his car in the basement garage of the Psychosurgery Annex his manner had subtly altered, and he was consciously aware of it. Here, in a way, he was royalty. Every successful surgeon since the beginning of time knows the feeling, and lives for it. The surgeon is a king, his subjects the internes and nurses, his kingdom the incarnate manifestations of his specialty.

He took the elevator to the first level and signed in.

"Hello, Dr. Bard," a quiet voice said at his shoulder.

He turned. "Oh, hello Paul. And Alvin. Who's the newcomer?"

Paul introduced him. "Dr. Bard, this is John Newland. Allergy and psychology at N.Y.U. He wants to spend two years on psychocatharsis under you, if you have room."

"You can join us today, and we'll have a talk later, John."

"Yes, sir, Dr. Bard."

Hugo started walking slowly toward the elevator, the three internes respectfully a half pace behind him.

"The patient we are going to see," Hugo said, "is a good one to begin with. Quite common, though almost at the f.a. pause. They seldom get that far these days before being corrected. A sixty-forty personality, so it would have been murder rather than suicide. She suffered basic insecurity that required domination-compensation she never received. What I will do during surgery is take her back to key incidents where she sought justified punishment without receiving it, and give it to her. Then her Father-God archtype will be balanced. She will have a set of memories that tell her she has been punished when she deserved to be, by something that loved her, couldn't be hurt by her, and

was capable of destroying her as well as protecting her. From herself as much as from environment. But of course, John, you've gone through all this in school. What you want and what you will get during your two years of internship will be observation of and experience with the techniques of catharsis under psychosurgery. To understand clearly all the time what is going on, you must learn to think in terms of the archtypes, because they are the common denominators. The mind is an organism whose vital parts are archtypes, just as the body is an organism whose vital parts are clearly defined organs. A defective gland in a child can often produce drastic effects on body structure by the time that child becomes an adult. A defective archtype can do the same to the growing mind. Here we are."

Hugo Bard and the three internes paused before a glass window. Through it they could see Mary Davis, asleep, her dull hair an unkempt mass under her head, her colorless lips partly open.

The double barrel of a tri-di video camera pointed down at her head from the ceiling. The boom of a mike went out from inside just below the observation window. And the observation window was just above a bank of instruments and controls.

Hugo Bard glanced at the chart beside the control board. He read it aloud for the benefit of the new interne. "Three c.c.'s of T.T.4C. at 3:05. The series of shots given the patient will have prepared her for surgery starting at nine o'clock. Eventually, John, you should learn how we tailor-make our mixtures for specific types. There are over a thousand specifics we draw on. The T.T.4C. mixture will reduce her temperature to ninety-six point four, about. That will put her at the bottom of her manic curve where we want her for the first stage of operation. The key to total recall of a gestalt is an emotion . . ."

Hugo was back at his offices by ten minutes to four. Mrs. Garson, gray hair youthfully permanented, was waiting. "Hello, Hugo," she gushed. He nodded, smiling absently. To Nancy he said, "Bring me the file on Green. I want to go over the poly reports in it." He strode on into his office and closed the door.

Nancy came in a moment later with the folio. "What about Mrs. Garson?" she asked.

"Have her wait. I'll get to her on time. Stay here for a minute, Nancy."

He thumbed through the layers of paper, and pounced on the one he was searching for. "Here it is," he said, mostly to himself. "I'm sure the polyanalyzer was wrong. It establishes interval, then bases it's conclusions on straight inter-

val. In rare instances that is false evaluation, because the mind can jump into high gear, then drop back. And look at this . . . Interval too short. Green completed the word in his mind before the polyanalyzer finished it. That gave him an extra fraction of a second to react. The poly recognized that only because it was confronted with a zero interval. I'm beginning to see what I missed — what is bothering me about Green avoiding his appointment today."

He looked up at Nancy. "Look at these, Nancy," he said. "You're interested in associations."

She stood beside him and looked at the paper.

"For house he said parlor. He wouldn't have thought of that word in connection with a house. It could only have been house: death in a house: funeral parlor: parlor. And down here — For horse he replied shoe — was he thinking shoot? The interval indicates shoe was the second word he thought of. The slowly expelled breath after it, everything indicates he has murder on his mind. And some of these others — he was at the f.a. pause day before yesterday. Get Captain O'Conner on the phone. Hurry."

Nancy hurried from the room to her desk outside. A moment later she had the connection.

"O'Conner?" Hugo Bard said. "This is Dr. Bard. Look — I know you can't stick your neck out. I'm not supposed to either, but I've been going over my file on Green again, and I'm prepared to sign a warrant for him as a dangerous potential criminal. It's a gamble, and I'll have to pay for it with the A.M.A. If he wants to carry it to them."

"Any idea whom he might kill, doctor?"

"None. If I had him here I could soon find out with a special association list. It's more than possible that it's happened already, in the past three days. Get the warrant ready. I'll be down by six thirty to sign it. My word on that. If my word is good enough, start searching for him right away."

He flicked the phone bar. "Nancy, send in the inpenated mind. What I won't go through for twenty-five dollars!" He heard Nancy's pleasant, "You may go in now, Mrs. Garson." He hung up, grinning.

At 6:05 he was rid of Mrs. Garson. At 6:25 he sign the warrant in the office of O'Conner who had waited personally for him, to meet him. O'Conner was quite interested in the case now. He had men on the case already. David Green was not home, nor could he be located. Green had a rich uncle, a girl friend, a service station and garage which he owned but didn't run himself. The

police were making headway.

From 6:35 to 6:38 Hugo Bard talked to his wife on the phone after having given his dinner order to a waiter in a quiet restaurant. He relaxed utterly during dinner, reading the newspaper, glancing at the people about him, savoring his food consciously at times in order to get his stomach interested.

At 7:22 while he was on dessert a man and woman descended on him. He glanced up, not recognizing them. Then he did. "Why Mrs. Gorham — Gertrude! Is this your husband?"

"I certainly am," the man said. "I've always hoped I would meet you so I could thank you for —"

"Not you," Mrs. Gorham said. "*I* received the psychosurgery, and I appreciate it far more than you can, Paul."

Hugo grinned. "Won't you join me? I'm about ready to leave, but I'll have another coffee with you. Always glad to see the results of my work. It gives me the will to keep on." His memory was filling in for him. Mrs. Gorham had been highly paranoiac — as are thirty percent of women who have been married a few years — only more toward the distinct psychopathic level, making life a living hell for everyone about her. Eventually she might have shot her husband for dropping ashes on the rug or something just as monumental. He realized with a start of surprise why he hadn't remembered her. She had been the big bosomed bloated belly type. Now she was well proportioned, graceful and graceous. Not being too interested in the physiological after-effects of psychocatharsis and surgery, it always surprised him to realize once again that a balanced mind produces a balanced body.

At 7:40 he took leave of the Gorhams. At 7:58 he checked in at the Psychosurgery Annex. He instructed the girl to tell the police where he was. From 8:10 to 8:50, accompanied by the three internes, he made the rounds of his hospitalized patients.

At 8:52 he stopped in front of the observation window to Mary Davis's room. And the p.a. speaker started saying, "Calling Dr. Bard. Calling Dr. Bard."

He went to the nearest local phone. "Dr. Bard talking. What is it?"

"Police Captain O'Conner is on the phone, Dr. Bard." And, a second later, "Dr. Bard? O'Conner. Remember my mentioning the rich uncle? Mr. Philo Green. Lived in a fortieth floor suite at the Waldorf. He leaped or was thrown from a window ten minutes ago. I'm there now. He left a suicide note. We still haven't located David Green. This is going to be damned embarrassing to you if the suicide is genuine. Want me to forget the warrant? Offi-

cially, that is. When we get David . . ."

"Use your own judgment, O'Conner. I'm three minutes away from surgery here at the hospital. I can't be reached for the next four hours. If you want me tonight you can get me here at exactly one a.m. Goodbye."

He dropped the phone and returned to the observation window. Inside, Mary Davis lay still, entirely naked except for numerous electrodes attached by tape to her body, a pneumatometer over her mouth and nose — utterly transparent so that her features weren't hidden, and other measuring instruments. Above her, bright red dots on the tri-di video camera indicated it to be alive and watching.

Beside Mary Davis inside the room, an interne and two nurses stood, each wearing headphones and soundproof mike masks, the cords spiraling from their heads toward the ceiling.

Hugo Bard sat down at the control panel. Directly in front of him a tri-di screen brought a realistic color image of Mary's head. Around the screen sensitive pointers in meters were delicately alive.

He absently placed earphones over his head, and at once he could hear the deep slow breathing of the patient.

"Hello, Mary," he said dreamily. "This is Hugo. Remember me."

As though echoing from an infinite distance, her voice replied. "Hello, Hugo."

And thus, simply, psychosurgery had begun. For John Newland, the freshman interne viewing it for the first time, it was at least hair raising. Infant squalling, baby talk, little girl talk, coming from the throat of a grown woman — to be interrupted often by what seemed a separate entity residing in the same body, an emotionless lost-soul voice from beyond heaven or hell, speaking from within the chest, describing, answering Dr. Bard's questions, obeying his commands.

Mary had been born with the juices of her mother's intense fear of immanent death still soaking her. She had sucked in her first breath untended, while the doctor and nurses concentrated on her mother. It had begun then, a gestalt at the cornerstone of Mind before the id identified itself with toe and thumb and mouth, before consciousness integrated the concept of *I* and *possessed* all the mental cosmos it could accept emotionally, fleeing from all else — and thus casting itself psychotically free of what should have been its solid rock of security.

Is a bottle half full or half empty? To Mary, her mother was always leaving her — to the terrors of being alone. Her father

was always leaving her — or not there. They never came. They were never there. They were leaving, or not there. Things fled, or were about to flee.

It was, of course, just one tributary of the river of Mind, isolated by drug-fixed morbidity and artificially induced depression which walled off the happier moments, the gay hopes — often fulfilled. But it was real, and the bil of its spring waters polluted the broad currents of the adult stream of consciousness. So much so, in fact, that Mary's libido, that vast unconscious stream of directed and undirected many-layered motivations and drives of which the conscious mind is almost the complete tool — or victim, in this case — was obsessed with murder, self destruction, general destruction, and revenge against everything. And held in check only by an intense fear of being *alone.*

Even to Dr. Hugo Bard it was a nightmare, listening to the disembodied chest-voice of the unconscious woman, the voice of her *monitor* (conscience, superconscious ego, etc.) as it patiently portrayed the progression of the gestaltic stairway from the subdepths of pre-birth to the present.

The rundown was completed at midnight. Immediately Dr. Bard returned Mary to the moment of birth, before she had taken her first breath. Here was the point where the first Lie must be firmly implanted.

Special drugs to disorient her entire motor nerve network had to take effect. Antidote for the temperature depressant was included in the mixture. A drug (first isolated in 2005 A.D., which, when injected in laboratory rats caused them to go berserk with fear) was injected directly into the aorta. Suggestion paralyzed the diaphragm. Complete physiological recapitulation of the post-birth sequence of events was created, with split-second timing. The bed on which Mary lay was upended in one violent jerk. An electric hammer built into the bed gave her behind a brutal spank. And a tape recording produced the sound effects of a loving, heartlessly cruel Father and Protector, as fear-antidote, and *aside* hypnotic direction implanted the new — the *secure* — transfer from the womb to independent existence.

At 1:00 A.M. Mary was "less than an hour old" and Hugo Bard was more weary than he had ever been in his life, he thought. He left her that way, with a nurse crooning softly in her ears and speaking to her as a loving mother speaks to her newborn child. It was a psychosurgical Lie, but it would anchor a floating mind to a secure bedrock of sane balance.

And it was only the beginning.

"Calling Dr. Bard. Calling Dr.

Bard . . ." the p.a. speaker said in a pleasant feminine voice. Hugo wiped his sleeve across his forehead and went to the hall phone. "This is Dr. Bard," he said quietly.

A moment later a familiar voice sounded. "This is O'Conner, doctor. I stayed up to give you a report. We picked up David Green and booked him on an open charge. It doesn't look like we can make a murder charge stick, though. We've been trying to crack the case open, but the suicide note stymies us. It's Philo Green's handwriting, all right. Everything about the case spells suicide. We're working on David to break down his alibi. I personally think it's murder, now. One of the cleverest murders I've run across. Want to come down and talk to David?"

Hugo glanced at his watch. It was 1:03. "Could you take him to my office?" he said. "We can clear this whole thing up there."

"It's irregular, but — okay."

"Be there in half an hour," Hugo said wearily, and hung up.

He showered and had a brief rub down in Physiotherapy, drank a cup of hot coffee gratefully that a student nurse had waiting for him, conscious of her worshipful eyes on him, knowing the cause of that worship, knowing that he was worthy of it. Egoboost, but well earned. From 1:26 to 1:27 he was on the elevator descending to the basement garage, thinking briefly of his wife, wondering if she was asleep, wanting to call her but knowing he wouldn't.

At 1:36 he parked at the curb in front of his offices, behind a darkened police car. "Hello, O'Conner. Hello David," he said, shaking hands. He led the procession to the entrance door and unlocked it, turning on lights as he went through to his office. He switched on the polyanalyzer so it could warm up.

Without looking at David Green he said, "You know, don't you, David, that I'm going to find out whether you killed your uncle. The evidence won't be accepted in court, but once these men know for sure that you did, they'll break you down, destroy your alibi. They're strictly twentieth century."

"Aren't you violating professional ethics in this business?" David Green asked, his voice careful.

"Perhaps. Strip—" Dr. Bard was interrupted by a fit of coughing from David Green. "Your flu bothering you, David? Strip to your shorts. I'm going to use the electrodes and get a complete physiological reaction chart." To O'Conner and his men, "You ever see a polyanalyzer work? It's the psychodiagnostician's main tool. Not perfect, but it's being improved all the time. I myself am working on an idea which will

make it more perfect — eliminate more of the guesswork."

"We have our lie box," O'Conner said. "Not as elaborate, of course, and too many people can beat the lie box."

David Green had undressed. "Lie down on the couch, David," Dr. Bard said. When David Green complied, he started taping paste smeared electrodes to his skin. "Even so," he said absently, "the polyanalyzer is crude compared to what we have for mental surgery. It's just an office instrument — a probe. You're perspiring rather freely, David." He touched a control on the polyanalyzer. A pointer in a sensitive meter jumped away from zero. "Hmm. You're running a slight temperature." Other meters came to life. "Did you kill your uncle, David?"

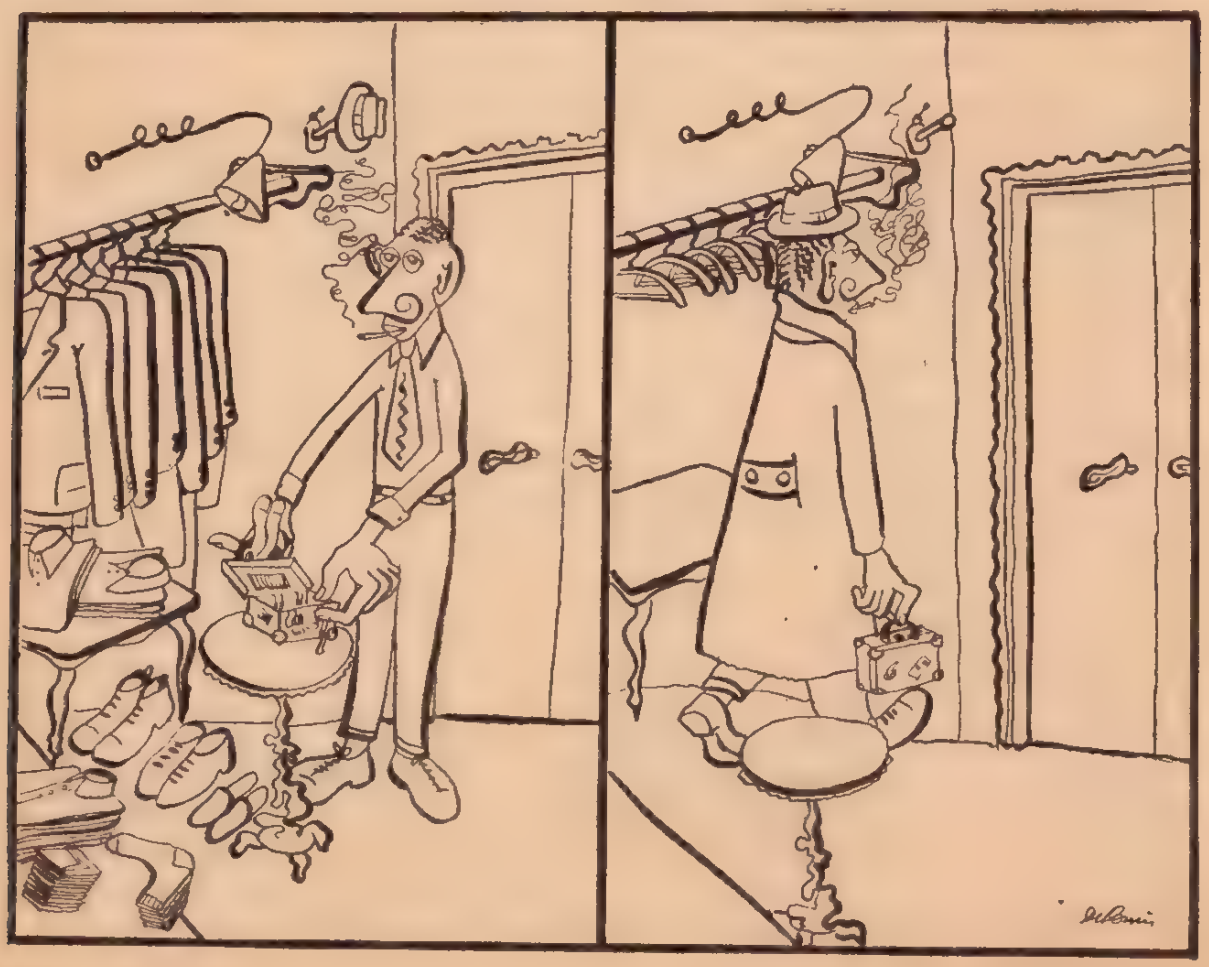
"No."

O'Conner said, "God! Look at those needles jump all over the dial! He's lying sure as shooting."

"That could mean — something else," Dr. Bard said quietly. "Where were you when your uncle fell from the window, David?"

"I was at a show."

Dr. Bard's eyes studied the variations of the instruments. "I'm sorry, David," he said regretfully. "You're lying. Did you



murder your uncle? Answer me."

"No." The instruments moved wildly.

Hugo Bard went to a filing cabinet and came back with a tape spool. "I'm going to run a word-association, David," he said.

Eyes watched in fascination as he inserted the spool. The poly-analyzer spoke a word. David answered. Again. It went on and on. Finally Dr. Bard shut off the machine. Its lights dimmed. The needles drifted down to their zero pegs. The doctor seemed lost in thought, while O'Conner and his men watched him with wide eyes, waiting.

"Did he do it?" O'Conner finally said, breaking the silence.

"In a sense," Dr. Bard said quietly. "Not in the legal sense. His uncle actually committed suicide. That's true, isn't it David?"

"Yes." It was subdued.

Dr. Bard sighed. "What really happened was that you knew he was going to. That's what filled your thoughts lately with death. You were sandwiched between your uncle and the possibility that I might find out what was going on. I'll let it go at that — provided you agree to enter the hospital for surgery. We'll make that a week from now. After the funeral."

O'Conner's voice was edged with anger. "You mean he didn't do it? We've gone through all this for nothing?"

"I wouldn't say that," Hugo Bard said. "If you could have picked up David right away I could have learned what was going on, and you could have prevented the suicide. It was, in a very real sense, murder. But you can't convict a man of murder just by proving he knew suicide was immanent — and wanted it to happen." Hugo sighed. "Think about it. I might feel I need the help of your department again. I hope I will get it. Some day —" He stopped talking, smiled tiredly. As a specialist he had dreams of megalomania about his profession. Dreams in which even the police department was a minor subdivision instrument of mass psychosurgery, creating a perfect world of balanced, healthy minds.

"Call on me any time," O'Conner said gruffly. "Maybe I might use you sometime. First time I've ever seen much of this stuff. Put your clothes on, Green. We have to take you with us. You'll be released in the morning. But do what the doctor says — or we'll keep an eye on you."

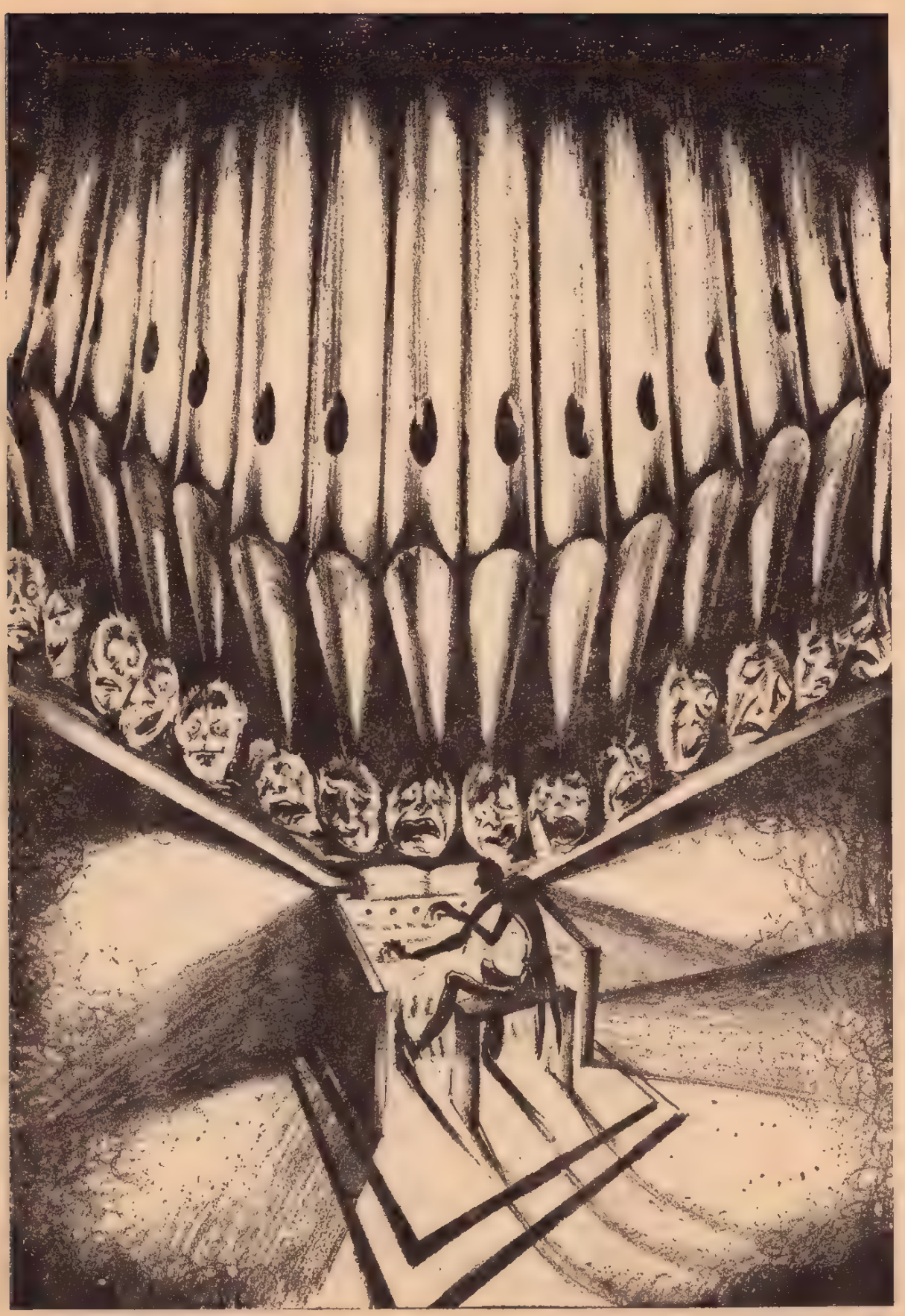
After a while they were gone. Hugo went to the back room and bathed his face in cold water. He came back and cleared the poly-analyzer, and filed the tapes.

He glanced at his watch before turning off the lights. It was 2:53.

He wondered if his wife was asleep. He sighed.

She led a rough life.

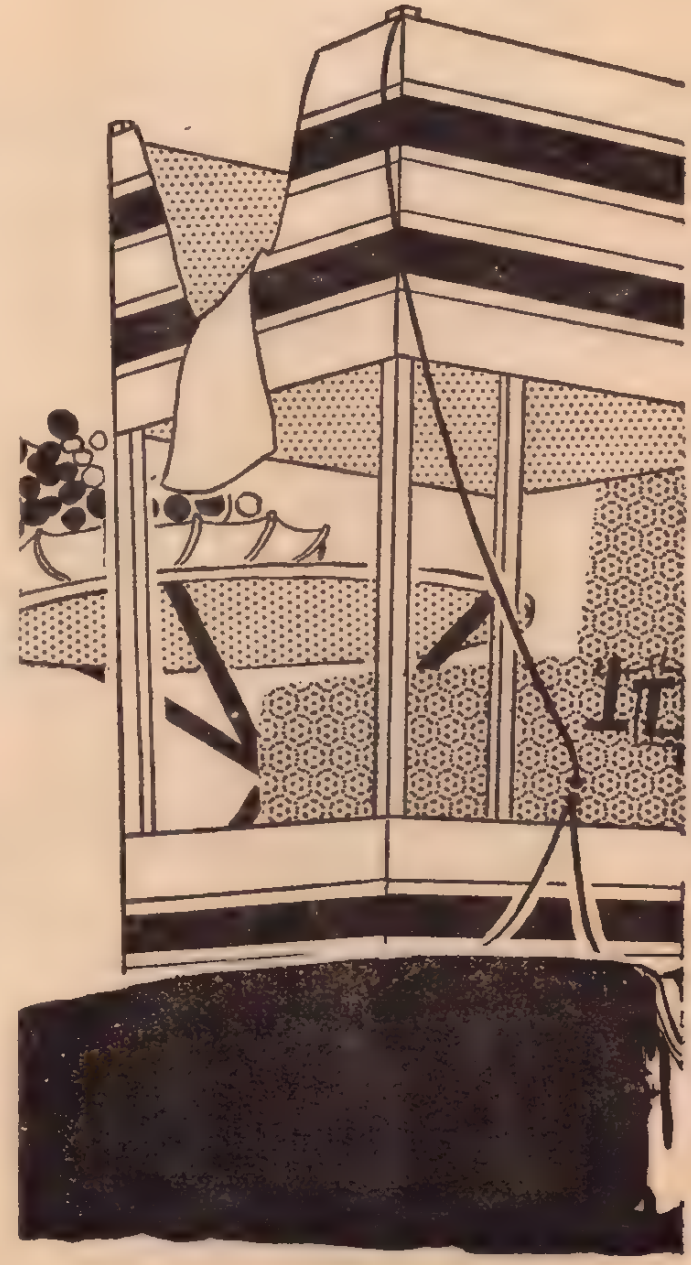
GYULA ZILZER • a portfolio



THE CHASE

BY BILL PETERS

You take a bright young man and his pretty little wife. To this combination, you add a huge stone wheel, a broken kite, a dusty old saddle, and what have you got? A hopeless conglomeration? Well, yes and no. Yes, when they confront the average person. But when a talented and experienced writer like Bill Peters gets his hands — or rather, his mind — on them, you have the ingredients of as sharp a fantasy-mystery as we've read in many and many a day.



DAVE MASTERSON arrived home as usual about six o'clock. He returned the doorman's casual greeting, made some comment about the weather (it had been a blistering day) and then walked gratefully into the dim cool lobby of the East River apartment building in which he had been living for the past three months. The elevator operator smiled at him, and made some typical remark about the heat.

"Yes, it was a real scorcher," Dave said.

BARTH

They shot up noiselessly to the seventeenth floor, and by the time he stepped from the car Dave was already feeling the restoring pleasure of home-coming. They — he had been married three months — wouldn't have dinner right away, of course. First he'd get out of these clothes and shower. Polly would have drinks ready on the small terrace then, and they would spend a lucky, comfortable hour there watching the river boats and chatting over the day's events. This was excellent therapy for the tensions that built up during a day devoted exclusively to planning campaigns to sell more and ever more Easy Fit shirts. You told yourself you wouldn't let it happen, he was thinking as he walked down the thickly carpeted corridor to his apartment. You looked at your healthy face in the mirror each morning as you shaved, and you said, "Look, old man, this is just a business. It's not a matter of life and death. So relax. Let the beavers go eagerly after their commissions and ulcers. But you play it smart. That's the way. Relax! To hell with the half-hour crisis, the hourly catastrophe. You've got a nice little apartment (which costs more than you can afford) and a nice little wife (who's eighty-six times better than you deserve) so don't knock yourself in the great struggle to sell more Easy Fit shirts, and add a few more million dollars to old John Adams' bank account."

You said all that, he thought, fitting his key into the lock, and you meant it — you meant it until the lather dried away. Then you got to the office and got involved in the old rat-race and all your good intentions went down the drain. Well, he thought cheerfully, maybe you really *want* an ulcer. Maybe you'd be bored silly on that South Sea Island you're always threatening to retire to. To hell with it for the moment, he decided, smiling as he opened the door. Now is the time for a shower, a long cool drink, and a kiss from your brand-new wife, Polly.

The blinds of the living room were pulled down against the slanting afternoon sun, and for an instant he stood in the doorway, blinking in the unaccustomed dimness.

"Woman!" he called out. "Attend me! I have the carcass of a sabre-tooth account executive over my shoulder. Light the bonfire and rejoice."

It was then, as his eyes focused, that he saw her slim figure sprawled on the floor. She was lying face down, across what seemed to be a huge stone wheel, and one of her hands rested limply on a battered, dust-caked saddle.

There were several other curious objects in the long elegantly furnished room, but Dave paid no attention to them; nothing mattered to him but his wife. Even

the wild incongruity of a great stone wheel and an old dusty saddle in his living room failed to catch his interest for more than a fleeting instant.

Dave knelt beside her, calling her name furiously. Then, as she didn't answer, he got her into his arms and carried her into the bedroom. She was breathing deeply and evenly, and there was a tiny quiver of motion in her eyelids. He put her on the bed, straightened out her legs and began to rub her hands.

"Baby, baby, what's the matter?" he said, over and over.

She moved her head slowly from side to side on the pillow but didn't answer. Still gripping her hands tightly with one of his, Dave lifted the phone and dialed Operator. When a cool competent voice answered, he said, "Look, I've got to have a doctor right away. And the police. This is an emergency."

"Where are you phoning from?"

Dave gave her his address and hung up . . .

He sat beside the bed holding his wife's hand as he waited for help. There was no change in her manner. She lay quietly, returning the pressure of his grip and moving her head slowly from side to side. But she didn't speak or open her eyes. He touched her forehead and was slightly relieved to find that she had no fever. The ends of her closely-cut blonde hair were slightly damp, and he guessed that she had bathed or showered shortly before he had arrived home. He stared mutely at her pale still face, his lips moving in a vague, formless prayer. *Help her, help her, help her. . . .*

Polly was a rather small girl with a trim hard body, and fine wheat-colored hair that was cropped close to her head in a poodle-cut. She had always impressed Dave with her enormous vitality and good humor; in the time he had known her, seven months, she had never been tired or depressed. She had delicate, pretty features, and loved clothes, the sun, and sports of all kinds. But, surprisingly enough, in addition to this she was extremely well-informed and owned a wide streak of common sense.

Dave tried not to think of any of this as he stared helplessly at her still body. She was wearing very brief white shorts, almost a Bikini style, and nothing else but a halter and bright red sandals. It was the costume a child would choose for herself if she could get away with it, and Polly dressed that way for him when they weren't having guests for cocktails. She looked very young and helpless, with her small blonde head moving restlessly, and her slender brown legs limp and languid on the bed.

He rubbed his forehead with

his fist, trying to fight down his fear, trying desperately not to think of what might happen to him if he lost her.

And trying not to think of those incredible things in the living room; the great stone wheel, the dusty saddle, and the other objects that he had sensed rather than seen in the dimness. . . .

Then his doorbell sounded, sharply, insistently.

The detective was named Bennet. He had arrived after the uniformed patrolman had phoned his district and admitted that it looked like something for an investigating officer. Bennet had arrived about ten minutes after the doctor, who was now in the bedroom with Polly.

Bennet didn't talk much. He was a tall rangy redhead, with mild blue eyes and a long nose which he fingered occasionally with an expression of vague surprise.

"This junk," Bennet said, waving a hand slowly about the living room. "You say you don't know where it came from?"

"That's right," Dave said. "It was here when I got home, that's all I know. And my wife was lying right there." He pointed to the big stone wheel. "None of it was here when I left for work this morning."

"Hmmmm," Bennet said, looking about the room.

In addition to the wheel and the saddle, there was a thin metal tube about an inch in diameter and nearly eight feet long. It was sealed at both ends, and weighed three or four pounds. Also there was a box kite, about four-feet square. Some of the thin wooden arms of its frame were broken, and the paper covering it was torn in a dozen places.

The wheel was the most outlandish of all these outlandish things. It was chipped and broken in many places, but it nevertheless weighed several hundred pounds. Dave and Bennet had tried to lift it but hadn't succeeded in getting it more than a few inches off the floor.

"How come you called the police?" Bennet asked mildly.

"Well, who should I have called? The Fire Department? The Bureau of Licenses, maybe?"

"Now take it easy," Bennet said. "What I meant was, did you think somebody had attacked and slugged your wife?"

"I didn't think anything, I guess," Dave said. "I was scared. What would you do if you came home and found your wife unconscious on the floor, and your living room looking like a junk yard?"

"Well, I guess I'd do about what you did," Bennet said. "But you're still missing my point. What I'm after is whether you saw something, consciously or un-

consciously, that made you think of yelling for the cops."

Dave shook his head slowly. "I've told you everything just the way it happened."

"Okay. Let's try to find out who brought this junk up here. That shouldn't be too hard."

He left the apartment and returned a few moments later with Charlie, the man who ran the building's freight elevator. Charlie, a big, solidly built figure in a blue uniform, jerked his head uneasily at Dave.

"How do, Mr. Masterson," he said. And then he looked about the room and his eyebrows went up slightly.

"You ever see any of this stuff before?" Bennet asked him.

Charlie shook his head slowly. He didn't know what this was all about, obviously; he was ready to frown or grin as soon as he got his cue.

"Well, how'd it get up here then?" Bennet said.

"I don't know," Charlie said, rubbing his big hands along the sides of his trousers. He glanced nervously from Bennet to Dave. "Is something wrong, Mr. Masterson?"

"I'll ask the questions," Bennet said, but he put this ancient formula pleasantly enough. "We just want to get to the bottom of where this stuff came from, and who brought it up here. If it didn't come up on the freight elevator, what's your best guess?"

"I ain't got any," Charlie said, after a pause. "If I didn't bring it up then nobody brought it up." He stared indignantly at the objects whose presence made a mockery of his statement. "I mean I don't know how they got here," he said, at last, in a puzzled voice.

"Is there just one freight elevator?"

"That's right, and I was on it all day."

"How about the passenger elevator?"

"No, nobody could bring stuff like this into the lobby. It would come around to me. But it didn't, understand?"

"We'll check the passenger elevators anyway," Bennet said. "You stick around, Charlie."

"Yes, sir."

When he left the room Charlie shifted awkwardly on his feet. "I hear the doctor came up here," he said. "Is there something wrong with the Missus?"

"I don't know, I just don't know," Dave said wearily.

"Well, I hope to God she's all right," Charlie said, and there was no mistaking the urgent sincerity in his voice. "She's a great little lady. There's some in buildings like that won't talk to the likes of me, but that wife of yours hasn't any ideas like that. She's a great little lady, and if anybody put a finger on her I'd like to meet the guy, that's all I'll say."

"Thank you, Charlie," Dave said. He turned away because he had the feeling that he might make a fool of himself if he looked Charlie in the eye.

Bennet came back a bit later and shook his head emphatically. "The passenger operators didn't bring it up. I talked to all of them that were on duty today. So where does that leave us?" Bennet looked at Charlie. "Did you bring anything or anybody up here today?"

"Sure. A couch for a lady down the hall, and laundry, cleaning, stuff like that for lots of people."

"But nothing for this apartment?"

Bennet thought a moment, frowning. "Yeah, the groceries," he said. "Mrs. Masterson orders by phone from the store at Lexington. The boy got here about three o'clock."

"How big a package did he bring?"

"Well, it wasn't big enough to hold all this junk," Charlie said firmly. "It was a cardboard box, maybe a foot square or so."

"It's probably still here then," Bennet said.

"Sure. The garbage and trash is picked up after supper, you know, around nine."

"I eat supper at five-thirty," Bennet said.

"Well, there's different customs all over," Charlie said tolerantly. "But our people eat dinner about eight. After cocktails, you know," he said, twisting the knife.

"Sure, they're hot shots," Bennet said.

Dave followed Charlie and the detective into the small, well-equipped kitchen. An empty cardboard box was under the sink. Dave opened the refrigerator and saw lamb chops, asparagus, things for salad. He noticed also a tray on the sideboard which held two glasses, a cocktail shaker and ice bucket. Polly had had everything ready as usual; drinks on the tray, supper in the refrigerator.

"I guess she put the food away," he said. His voice sounded very thin and tight in his ears.

"Well, nobody could have got all that junk into this little box anyway," Bennet said. He scratched his head. "This business is beginning to annoy me."

The bedroom door opened then and the doctor came out, wiping his glasses with a big clean handkerchief.

"Mr. Masterson?" he said, looking Dave up and down.

"Yes. How's my wife. Can I see her now?"

"Presently. She's resting comfortably at the moment, and is in no danger. She's had some sort of shock, and will require a day or two of rest. I've left a prescription on the table by the bed. You see to it that she takes it accord-

ing to instructions. Understand?"

"Yes, certainly. But what kind of a shock did she have?"

"I don't know," the doctor said. "You'll have to excuse me now."

Dave strode into the bedroom and knelt beside Polly. She opened her eyes and smiled at him. "I've been an awful bother, haven't I?" she said softly.

He shook his head quickly, not trusting himself to speak. Then he caught her in his arms and pulled her close to him, needing her warm and safe against him as a man dying of thirst needs water.

He didn't realize that they weren't alone until Bennet cleared his throat and said, "Sorry to intrude, Mr. Masterson."

Dave looked up at him, still holding Polly in his arms. "What do you want?" he said.

"Just a question or two of your wife. Mrs. Masterson, I'm a detective. Your husband called me when he came home and found you lying in the living room. Now," Bennet paused and rubbed his forehead, "can you tell us how those things got in there?"

"What things?"

"Do you feel strong enough to walk in there and see?"

"To the living room? Certainly."

"You don't have to, honey."

"But I want to know what this is all about."

With Dave holding her arm, she went into the living room. She looked about for a few seconds in silence. "What *is* all this stuff?" she said.

Bennet frowned. "We don't know, Ma'am. And nobody seems to know how it got here. But your husband tells us you were lying on that stone wheel when he came in."

"Was I, darling?"

"That's right," Dave said. "Now look, you'd better get back to bed. The doctor said you had to rest."

"Mrs. Masterson, what do you remember about passing out?" Bennet asked her.

"The doctor asked me that same question, but I wasn't much help, I'm afraid. I had left the bathroom after my shower, and I was thinking of getting the ice cubes out. And that's all I remember."

Bennet looked at her closely for a moment or so, his mild blue eyes deep and thoughtful. "Well, I hope you'll feel better in the morning," he said. Then he scratched his head. "I'll run along now. There's no laws been broken that I can see. But I'm not happy about this business, not for a moment."

After he'd gone Dave took Polly back to bed. He plumped up the pillows, removed her sandals and made her lie down under a light blanket.

"Do you feel like something to

eat?" he said then. "Maybe a clear soup and a chop."

"No, darling. Really I'm not a bit hungry."

"Okay. I'll call the drug store and get this prescription in the works."

When he returned to the bedroom, she said, "Sit here beside me, please."

"Sure. It's a pleasure." He sat on the edge of the bed and held her hands. "Feeling better?"

"Yes, I think so. Dave I have something to tell you. Try to be patient with me, please."

"All right," he said slowly. Her face and eyes were very grave. He had never seen her this way before.

"I bought those thing in the living room," she said.

"You *what?*"

"I bought all of those things," she said firmly. "At junk shops and antique shops on Second and Third avenues. And I made Charlie promise to tell no one that he brought them up here."

"But this is crazy, honey," he said.

"I know," she admitted. "And the worst of it is that I don't know why I did it. Isn't that weird?"

"Well, sort of," Dave said, scratching his head. "But maybe it's nothing to worry about. I was getting a little sick of the way the living room looked, if you must know. That new stuff dresses it up pretty nicely. Don't you think?"

"Now don't be kind and thoughtful about it," she said.

"Should I tie you to the bed and beat you? Seriously, you probably had a whim to get those things, so you went ahead with it. Nothing wrong with that. Good healthy reaction, as a matter of fact." He squeezed her hands, smiling at her and not believing himself for an instant. And he was very frightened. "Let's don't talk about it anymore," he suggested.

"All right. You're being very sweet."

"Nonsense."

The boy from the drug store arrived a little while later, and Dave gave Polly her medicine. She felt a bit hungry then, so he fixed her a bowl of broth with crackers. There was nothing externally wrong with her; she looked the same and talked the same but this semblance of normality was belied by that hideously incongruous assortment of junk in the living room. She had bought that stuff, had smuggled it into the apartment, and for no reason at all. And she had lied about it to the detective, Bennet.

Dave went to bed that night a very worried man. He didn't sleep right away, of course. He lay staring at the ceiling, smoking in the darkness and listening with part of his mind to her deep even breathing. With the rest of his

mind he was toting up his savings and credit possibilities, and splitting them up in terms of specialists, sanitariums, changes of scene . . . Finally, toward morning, he dropped into restless sleep.

He awoke, dazed and shaken, to the clatter of the alarm clock. For an instant he couldn't remember what was wrong. He had only the vague troubled presentiment that soon he would recall some distressingly bad news. And he did remember of course when he turned to Polly's bed.

It was empty, but the sight of the rumpled bedclothes, and the soft indentation in the pillow reminded him of last night, of the stone wheel, and of her bewildering behavior.

He left the bedroom, wondering where she was, and it didn't take him more than ten seconds to realize that she wasn't in the apartment. When he returned to the bedroom, half-running now, he saw the note pinned to the edge of her pillow.

Why hadn't he spotted it instantly? He ripped it loose from the pillow and read the message, which was written in her neat, precise handwriting. It was a very short little note: "*Darling, I'm sick. I know it. So I'm going away until I feel better. Please don't follow me. If you still love me, don't try to find me.*"

She hadn't bothered to sign it.

Dave hesitated a moment, aware in a dim, confused fashion that his mind wasn't working at all. He was like a tree or a vegetable, rooted to the ground, unable to think or move. How long this inanimate inertia gripped him he didn't know; but at last he was moving and his mind was functioning.

All right, she's gone, he thought. The first thing to do is get her back. And that was a job for the police. He was at the phone when he realized that they would want a description of what she had been wearing. That wouldn't be too hard to determine. He went through her closet, sliding suits and dresses along pole and trying to decide what was missing. Two dresses were gone. Luckily they were similar in appearance. A white silk print with a pattern of small flowers. Brown-and-white spectator pumps, no hose. Short white gloves, a cocoa-colored straw hat. A bracelet of junk jewelry on her left wrist.

That was the outfit she had worn, and she had taken an overnight bag for the extra dress, lingerie, and toilet articles.

Within two minutes he was talking to Bennet. The detective listened quietly, interrupting him only once or twice with questions. Dave told him everything — that Polly had bought the unlikely assortment of items in the living room for no reason at all, and that she had left him. He read him

Polly's note and then gave him a description of the clothes she had worn.

"All right," Bennet said, when he finished. "I'll give all this to the Missing Persons Bureau and they'll get her on the radio right away. Let's see, your wife was about five three and weighed what? One fifteen, one twenty?"

"She was five two, and weighed one hundred and eight pounds," Dave said.

"You say she seemed pretty calm last night, eh?"

"That's right."

"Well — have you two been getting along okay? You know lots of wives pull stunts like this when they're having trouble with their husbands."

"No, we've been getting along perfectly," Dave said. But how could you be sure? he thought.

"We'll do our best to find her," Bennet said. "Maybe her nerves are just a little shot. Maybe all she needs is a rest. I'll call you if we get any news."

"Thank you."

Dave phoned his office to tell his secretary he wouldn't be in that day and then, because he couldn't bear to be idle, showered, shaved and dressed. He made coffee and ate a piece of toast. After that he did all the dishes and tidied the apartment. Then he sat down in the living room and stared angrily at the junk that Polly had purchased. Why would she do it? What compulsion drove her to buy this great wheel, this dusty old saddle, the broken kite and long metal bar? It made no sense at all. And why had she left him? That was the most painful of all the questions that crowded into his mind. Surely she must know she could trust him for help and understanding.

At noon Bennet phoned him. "We don't have anything yet," he said. "But the call is going out every fifteen minutes on the police radio, so we should get a break pretty soon. How much money did she have with her?"

"I don't know. Not a great deal. Fifty or sixty dollars maybe. But she could have stopped at the bank."

"We'll check that. I'll let you know when we get a lead."

The day wore on. Dave wandered distractedly through the small apartment smoking one cigarette after another and making a fruitless effort to convince himself that the police were doing everything possible, and that there was nothing for him to do but sit tight and wait for news from Bennet. That was all true enough but it didn't relieve his galling sense of impotence. He decided to stick it out until six o'clock; if there was no news by that time he would go out to look for her himself. Anything positive was preferable to futile waiting.

Then, at five-thirty, there was a knock on the front door. Dave ran to answer it, with only one hopeful thought in his mind: she had come back!

But it wasn't Polly who had knocked, it was a solidly-built, middle-aged man in a limp seersucker suit. He wore rimless glasses and behind these his blue eyes glinted with lively intelligence. There was a competent, efficient look about him, in the square thrust of his jaw, the steadiness of his gaze, and the high imposing sweep of his forehead.

"I'm sorry to bother you at this time, Mr. Masterson," he said in a deep and pleasant voice. "My name is Dr. Shaw, and I live in the building across the street."

"What was it you wanted to see me about?" Dave said.

"I think perhaps that I can help you find your wife, Mr. Masterson. May I come in?"

Dave caught him by the arms. "Is this some kind of a joke?"

"Believe me, I am not a sadist, Mr. Masterson. This is no matter for joking. I have thought long and anxiously before coming here. I feared I might raise your hopes and be unable to fulfill them. But I had to come to see you, I realized at last. So long as there was the chance that I might help you, then it was my plain responsibility to do what I could."

Dr. Shaw's sincerity came through with each word, and Dave felt a new confidence growing in him. "Very well, please come in," he said.

"Thank you." Dr. Shaw entered the living room and looked at the strange objects that Polly had bought. He knelt beside the great stone wheel and peered at it closely. Then he inspected the saddle, the kite and the long metal tube, and on this last item he spent several minutes. Then from his squatting position he looked up at Dave. "I heard about these things, and your wife's disappearance, from the doorman of my building. He had got the news from one of the staff here. I went to work as usual this morning but I couldn't concentrate on my experiments." He rose and began pacing the floor, a faint frown clouding his large intelligent features. "The presence of these things here plus the fact that your wife had vanished added up to a hypothesis which had ominous implications."

"You mean she's in danger?"

"No, not yet. If my guess is valid your wife is safe for the moment. But there is a good chance that she will face serious danger in the near future."

"How do you know so much about it?" Dave demanded.

"I am not sure of what I know," Dr. Shaw said, undisturbed by the challenge in Dave's manner. "I am a scientist, a nuclear physi-

cist, and I have spent a lifetime studying the properties of our universe and the nature of the time and space which enclose it. And I am sure of only one thing, and that is the uncertainty of my information and the conclusions I have drawn from it. Therefore I must beg you to listen to me in the same spirit of humility in which I speak to you. Make the effort to rid your mind of predjudice, of pre-conceived notions, of all rigid loyalty to that which is old and familiar, and all resentment to that which is new and strange. Only in that way can we progress toward a solution of a problem which is mine as well as yours. Will you make that effort, Mr. Masterson?"

There was an honesty and integrity blazing in the man's face and words, Dave nodded slowly. "I'll do anything that will get my wife back," he said.

"Excellent. Now let us look at these objects carefully." Dr. Shaw's manner was brisker now, and charged with suppressed excitement. "Does their nature tell you anything?"

Dave shook his head.

"Then let us think about them. A wheel, a saddle, a kite. These three objects possess one common property; they can be used in flight or transportation. The last item, the bar of metal, may or may not have the same property. But I am going to assume that it does for the moment. And now to go on a bit. How did these things get into your apartment?"

"My wife bought them at junk shops around town, and bribed the freight elevator man to bring them up here and say nothing about it."

Dr. Shaw tilted his big head to one side. "No, that is not true."

"You mean she lied?"

"She told you what she may have thought to be the truth. There is a difference. No, two of these objects at least did not come from New York junk shops. Most certainly not. Of the remaining two I cannot be so emphatic. Look at this stone wheel first. It is a chariot wheel, or a cart wheel more accurately, of a type common in Greece five hundred years before the birth of Christ. Its condition indicates that it received heavy usage. It is no longer serviceable. Therefore it was discarded, thrown into an old pit most probably, some twenty-five hundred years ago. Now who would bring so worthless an object to the United States? It is difficult to imagine anyone doing that, don't you agree? Secondly, look at this metal tube. I do not know the nature of that metal, and I seriously doubt that it was mined on this planet of ours. As we know it, that is. Take a look at my ring now."

Dr. Shaw extended the little

finger of his right hand. He wore a diamond ring on that finger and the top of the stone was marred by two deep, jagged gashes.

"I deliberately scraped my ring on the end of this tube when I was examining it a moment or so ago," Dr. Shaw said. "You observe the result? This metal cut the diamond like a hot knife would cut butter. And since this metal is of a type hitherto unknown on earth, I think it is reasonable to doubt that your wife bought it in a Third avenue junk shop. Don't you agree?"

"Where did it come from?" Dave asked.

"That I do not know. From another planet perhaps. Or from time. I lean toward the latter conclusion."

"What in the name of God are you talking about?" Dave demanded.

Dr. Shaw took him by the arm and led him to a chair. "Please sit down," he said. "I am going to tell you something which will sound fantastic. But I beg you to remember your promise to accept what I say with humility and imagination."

"Don't worry, I can take it standing," Dave said. "Fire away."

"Very well. This is my hypothesis. These articles of transportation were brought here to this living room in a time machine. Some being from the future — perhaps millions of years in the future — has fled back to this era. I further believe —"

"Now hold on," Dave said. "I said I'd listen with humility, but that's not a synonym for stupidity."

"You think it would be stupid of you to listen to me?"

"I don't think, I know."

"Stupidity is a result of one of two things, my friend: the inability to ascertain facts, or the refusal to face them. You are in the latter category at the moment. You have looked at facts, but you are afraid of their implication and so you pretend that you didn't see them. Isn't that true?"

Dave was silent a moment, trying to follow Dr. Shaw's reasoning. Then he sighed softly and ran a hand through his hair. "But your explanation is preposterous," he said at last.

"And what would you call yours?"

"I don't have any explanation," Dave admitted.

Dr. Shaw smiled. "Let us at least look at mine then. This being from the far-distant future is fleeing from something or someone, I assume. He is searching for another means of flight. That is obvious. But why should he be searching for a means of transportation if he has a time machine? The answer that suggests itself to me is that his pursuer also has a time machine. Therefore our flee-

ing creature from the future must find a new method of transportation if he is to escape his pursuer. Let us for convenience give these beings — whose existence is still an assumption on my part — names to distinguish them. Supposing we call the hunter Z and the quarry X. X is fleeing from something, obviously. What it is, we can only conjecture. But flight presumes guilt, so let us accept as a fact that he is guilty. And pursuit presumes vengeance, or retribution so let us think of Z as an avenger. Is all of this acceptable to you?"

Dave didn't know what to say. So he said, "Sure, I'll string along. X is on the run, Z is hot on his trail. Is that it?"

"That is our assumption. It is a staggering concept, I must admit. Think of X, a superior being, the repository of millions of years of cultivation and development, think of this creature fleeing into the past, seeking refuge in the trackless forests of forgotten centuries. And following his every dodge and turn is the avenger, Z. X is searching for some means of flight that will enable him to elude his fate. Think of him in the fifth century before Christ, staring with puzzled eyes at a cart wheel. It is too primitive for him to understand immediately. But he eventually sees what it is used for and he takes it with him. And the same thing happens with the saddle, with the kite. Perhaps he didn't realize that the saddle required a horse under it, and that the kite was merely a toy. Perhaps he is helpless to infer the meanings and uses of these things, as helpless as you or I might be if we came upon an ant hill for the first time and found it necessary to determine by direct observation the meaning of these tiny creatures' infinite activity. Our inadequacy would stem not from a lack of intelligence but from a superabundance of it. And that may be the problem that X faced. But he solved that problem. He found a means of transportation, and has resumed his flight."

"What do you mean? What transportation did he find?"

"Your wife," Dr. Shaw said. "X de-materialized himself and took possession of your wife's consciousness. He will direct her to take him wherever it is that he must go. That is why I told you that she is in no danger for the moment. As long as she serves X's purpose, she will be safe. But when he no longer needs her she will be in great danger."

"I can't belive this," Dave said slowly. But in his heart he did believe it. Something about Dr. Shaw transformed these fantasies into blunt hard truth.

"Think of your wife's behavior," Dr. Shaw said. "Was it she, or was it someone else who told you those lies, who fled from you?"

"What can we do?" Dave asked him helplessly.

"Good!" Dr. Shaw caught his arm. "First you must tell the police that your wife has returned to you. Get them to stop their search. X cannot move while the police are after your wife. With the search for her ended, X will resume his flight. And we will follow."

"How can we find my wife without the police?"

"I have already located your wife," Dr. Shaw said quietly. "She is in a small hotel on West Fifty-Seventh street. Last night, when I heard of these objects, I hired a private investigator to watch this building, and to follow your wife if she went out."

"You knew she was going to run away?"

"Oh, yes," Dr. Shaw said. "I knew that X would waste no time. Quickly, now. Call the police. Tell them your wife has come home. Let them think it was merely a domestic spat. Then we will go to the hotel where your wife is staying, and make plans to follow her." . . .

The Hotel Roanoke was a small but respectable hotel between Seventh and Eighth avenues on Fifty-Seventh street. There was a pleasant, dimly-lighted bar which could be entered from the lobby as well as from the street, and it was here that Dr. Shaw and Dave met a tall, graying man who called himself Jones. He was the investigator Dr. Shaw had hired that morning.

Jones sat at the bar, a beer before him, in a position to watch the lobby and the desk.

"She went upstairs right after she registered," he told Dr. Shaw. "She hasn't been down since."

"Excellent. Mr. Masterson, Mr. Jones."

"You're her husband?" Jones asked Dave without curiosity.

"Yes. How did she seem?"

"Okay, I guess. Worried though."

"We'll take over now, Mr. Jones," Dr. Shaw said.

"Whatever you say, Doc."

Dr. Shaw gave him some money. Jones nodded to both of them, said, "So long," in a careless voice and strolled from the bar.

Dr. Shaw ordered drinks after they had settled on stools which gave them a view of the lobby. "Now it's only a question of time," he said. "When she comes down we'll be able to determine our course of action."

They were silent for a few moments. Then Dave said, "Are you sure she's in no danger?" His voice was steady, but his stomach was tense and cold with fear.

"She is safe for the time being, I believe. She will be safe as long as she is useful to X."

"Damn him, damn him," Dave said violently.

"Yes, he has done an evil thing."

They waited an hour at the bar, saying little to one another and watching the people who flowed back and forth across the lobby. Then Dave started as Polly appeared and walked quickly to the desk. She carried an overnight bag which she put down at her feet as the clerk presented her with a bill. Obviously she had phoned down to have her account ready. She fumbled in her purse and gave the clerk some money. He smiled and went away, presumably to make change.

Dave got slowly to his feet. Everything inside him ached with longing for her. He had believed Dr. Shaw while she was gone from him, but now that she was only ten seconds from his arms he forgot everything but his need and his fear. She was so slim and small standing there, so vulnerable and defenseless, that it made this cat-and-mouse farce suddenly unbearable.

Dr. Shaw caught his arm. "Sit down," he said quietly. "She doesn't know me. I'll follow her and see where she's going."

"No, I'm going to her," Dave said.

"You can't!"

"I can't stay here." Dave shook Dr. Shaw's hand from his arm. "I can't let her walk out of my life."

"Go to her now and she will be destroyed," Dr. Shaw said very softly. "Take her in your arms and you will hold a dead woman. That I can promise you. The only salvation is to let X use her now. Our chance will come later. That I also promise you."

Dave put both hands to his forehead. The pressure inside his head was so intense that he had the giddy fear that his skull might split open.

"All right, all right," he said thickly. "Follow her! Don't let her get away."

He sat down again but turned his eyes away from the lobby. He couldn't stand to watch her leave, he knew. Dr. Shaw rose and left the bar. Dave waited for him hopelessly; his mood had changed. Seeing Polly had charged and reanimated him, but now his spirits sunk back to a morass of despair. There was just nothing to be done. If Dr. Shaw's fantastic hypothesis was correct, what hope was there? And if he were wrong, what else could possibly explain this behavior of Polly's?

Dr. Shaw returned in a moment or so. His lively eyes glinted with excitement as he shook Dave's arm. "Don't count us out yet," he said. "She's gone to the International airport. We'll follow her. X has had everything his own way up till now, but we may give him a surprise. Come, let's go." . . .

The remainder of that night

was like the splintered images that flash through the mind in fearful, giddy dreams. They trailed Polly to the International airport where they learned (by watching her as she had her one piece of luggage weighed) that she had a ticket on the nine o'clock flight to Chicago. Dr. Shaw bought a seat on the same plane, and Dave arranged to take a ten-thirty flight that would get him to Chicago several hours after Polly's had landed. Dr. Shaw planned to follow Polly from the airport in Chicago. When he learned where she was heading for he would have Dave paged at the Chicago terminal and pass on the information. Then they would arrange to meet and pick up her trail.

Polly and Dr. Shaw left on the nine o'clock flight, and Polly apparently had no inkling that she was being followed. She sat in the waiting room until her flight was announced, her slim brown legs crossed, her hands folded quietly in her lap, her eyes looking straight ahead into space. When the nine o'clock plane to Chicago was called she rose and walked quickly to the exit gate from where the passengers were streaming out to the plane.

Dr. Shaw walked a few feet behind her . . .

Dave caught his flight an hour-and-a-half later. By then he wasn't even thinking any more. His mind felt like a sponge that had been squeezed dry. When he reached Chicago he walked up and down the immense, brightly-lighted waiting room, smoking tasteless cigarettes and watching the thin edge of dawn that was cutting across the horizon. Another day. People going to work. Trains and buses running. Breakfasts being eaten. Another day. And he walked in circles about a waiting room at the airport of a strange city, as disembodied and unreal as a figure in a nightmare . . .

Then the metallic voice of the announcer called his name.

Dr. Shaw's voice was crisp and urgent in his ear. "She's taken a train up to a little town in Wisconsin, a place on the Indian reservation. It's called Flambeau. We can pick her up there easily enough, I think, so I'll wait here for you. I'm at Union station. Meet me at the Information booth. Hurry."

And the phone clicked dead.

The cab ride took only a half-hour at that time of the morning, but to Dave it was a hopeless, pointless stretch of time — as every minute had been since Polly disappeared.

He met Dr. Shaw in the vast, vaulting expanse of the Union station. The doctor had tickets for a train that was scheduled to leave shortly, and within a matter of minutes they were rolling on their way. The train was a local, and their car was hot and stuffy. It was an eight-hour ride; the last

half of it seemed endless for the train stopped at every station during the Wisconsin leg of the trip. When they stepped down onto the platform at Flambeau, the sun hit them like a blinding sledge hammer. But there was a dry cool feeling to the air, and a pleasant scent of pine drifted in from the forests.

It was a small village, with a post office, gas station, garage, and several grocery stores. Dr. Shaw made inquiries at one of the stores and learned that Polly had bought a supply of food and had asked if there were any vacant cottages in the area. The grocery clerk, who was friendly and talkative, told them that she had wanted an out-of-the-way place where she wouldn't be bothered by the summer tourists.

"Funny thing," the clerk said, grinning. "Old Mac Johnny was in here at the time, and he sent her to a place of his. Nobody goes up there anymore. It's near Eagle Lake, if you know this country."

"No, I don't," Dr. Shaw said politely. "But I want to be satisfied that my daughter has chosen a safe place to stay. I have no objections to her desire for a back-to-nature vacation, but I shouldn't like her to get too far from civilization."

"Oh, she's your daughter, eh? Well, she's safe enough at old Mac Johnny's cottage. It's that far out of the way, you see."

"I suppose there's a taxi that could take us there?"

"Well, yes. But you'll have to wait for it to come back. Joe, that's the driver, took your daughter out and he ain't back yet."

"I see. Thank you very much."

They waited two hours for the taxi to return, and by then it was four o'clock in the afternoon. Joe, the driver, wasn't too eager to make another long trip, but Dr. Shaw overcame his disinclination with the promise of a sizeable tip.

And then they were off, bouncing over rutted dirt roads in the old car, winding their way between beautiful green stands of timber.

"X has planned this as his hide-out," Dr. Shaw said, nodding with satisfaction. "He would be quite safe from Z here, hidden away in the mind of a young woman, who ostensibly wanted only a little privacy in which to enjoy a vacation."

"How can we save my wife?" Dave cried despairingly. "I don't give a damn about X. I want her back."

"We will do what we can," Dr. Shaw said gravely.

It was a three-hour ride to Mac Johnny's cottage. When they came to a narrow lane on the left side of the road, the driver stopped and said, "Just follow that path by the lake. It's only a few hundred yards. That's where Mac

Johnny's place is. You'll find it."

Dr. Shaw paid him off and they climbed out of the car, stiff and tired from the long, bouncing trip. They entered the woods, and went along the winding path, moving cautiously through the windy darkness. With the setting of the sun the air had become cold; it whirled around them, tugging at their light summer clothes, chilling them to the bone. They followed the path for about ten minutes, and then Dr. Shaw held up his hand. Ahead of them was the smooth dark expanse of the lake, glinting faintly in the last dim light, and to the left of it was a small, wooden cottage, outlined blackly against the night.

"You must say nothing when we meet her," Dr. Shaw said. And now his voice had changed. It was determined and firm, and it felt like an iron bar through the dark silence. "Do you understand that? It is the only way we can hope for success."

"All right. Let's go!"

Dr. Shaw walked purposefully down the path to the lakeshore, and then followed a curving little lane that led to the porch of the cottage. He went up three wooden steps and hammered solidly on the door with the heel of his hand.

A light flashed inside. Then quick footsteps sounded, and the door was opened. Polly stood in the doorway, frowning at the doctor.

"What do you want?" she asked. She couldn't see Dave, in the darkness.

"We want to come in," Dr. Shaw said, pushing past her into the small, crudely furnished living room of the cottage. Dave followed slowly. He looked at his wife, but she returned his gaze without recognition.

"Polly, I —"

"Silence," Dr. Shaw said very quietly. He was staring at Polly, his eyes very bright and lively. She looked at him steadily, coldly, for a full minute. The silence settled heavily in the room. Outside a loon cried and the sound spread eerily through the darkness.

Polly took a step backward, and one of her hands moved to her throat. There was a fine line of perspiration on her forehead now and her breath was coming faster.

She opened her mouth and the sounds that came from it were shrill and unintelligible. Suddenly she dropped to her knees as if she had been struck a heavy blow from behind. Dave started for her. Dr. Shaw held up his hand imperiously, and shouted something wild and meaningless at her, as she knelt before him, her hands limp at her side, her head inclined on the slender column of her throat.

Dave was held motionless by a sense of terror in the room —

something vastly greater than his own fear and terror. He watched his wife sink slowly to the floor. She fell easily and softly, turning sideways and rolling limply onto her back, flinging her arms wide in the gesture of a person crucified; her slim ankles came together as if drawn to each other by invisible bonds.

And then she screamed and put her hands tightly over her face, and there was another sound in the room like that of high thin laughter in the depths of a great cavern.

Dave started for her but Dr. Shaw caught his arm. His face was haggard, and his high forehead was covered with beads of perspiration.

"X has gone," he said hoarsely. "Didn't you see? He has gone to the water."

"I saw nothing. I understand nothing," Dave cried helplessly.

"Your wife is safe. She is all right. Don't try to understand." Dr. Shaw gasped out these words as he fell heavily to the floor, and once again Dave heard a sound that drove chills of fear through his body. The sound was like that of laughter — high, thin laughter heard in a vast cavern, but now there was a hard, triumphant tone running through it, a sound of implacable, relentless vengeance.

And Dave saw something flash past him — going through the door and toward the water — as he ran to Polly's side and took her trembling body in his arms. She was hysterical, she knew nothing of what had happened, and she clung to him with the strength of a frightened child. There was nothing he could do but hold her tightly against him, and tell her that everything was all right and that they would be going home.

Explanations — of a sort — could come later. Dave knew he wouldn't tell everything he had learned — he knew that as Dr. Shaw sat up slowly and looked at him with puzzled eyes. "Say, what's all this?" Dr. Shaw said in a slow, wondering voice.

"It's something like amnesia," Dave said. "Who are you?"

"My name is Nelson, Jeremy Nelson. I — I live in New York. I'm an insurance man. Hey, I've got to get to a phone!"

"We'll get you to a phone," Dave said in the same quiet voice. "You're safe and there's nothing to worry about. Why not forget about everything else?"

"Well — it's the damndest thing I ever heard of. I — I never did anything like this before."

Nor had any of them, Dave knew. Out on the lake, or in the heavens, or in the woods, the two creatures responsible for their experience were racing through the darkness — or continuing the epic of guilt and vengeance and pursuit which had begun in some untold century of the distant future.

The Wrong People

By RALPH ROBIN

It must be understood that when Ralph Robin wrote this story, he was not trying to illustrate any socialogical trends; he was not pointing a finger at any particular type of person — agreeable, disagreeable, or otherwise. He was not working off any resentments or holding anyone up before the spot-light of clinical analysis. He was merely having himself some fun and we hope that you will have some fun too, in reading what he wrote.

DR. CHAPPELLEY had the sad and put-upon face of a man who never thinks a generous thought and his wife had the perky face of a woman of the same character.

They were a good pair. The *Praeternaturalis argenteus*, as it called itself, should never have dropped in.

Dr. Chappelley was a dentist.

Dr. Chappelley did not approve of:

1. The Bureau of Internal Revenue.
2. Salad with olive oil.
3. His assistant.
4. Foreigners.
5. An exodontist named Dr. Magpie.
6. People richer than he.
7. People poorer than he.
8. His wife.

Mrs. Chappelley did not approve of everything and everybody her husband did not approve of, except herself. In addition, she did not approve of pretty girls, the cleaning woman, and Dr. Chappelley.

One morning Mrs. Chappelley was at the kitchen sink tending

the garbage disposer, which was grinding away orange peels and egg shells and some old leftovers from the refrigerator. Her back was turned to Dr. Chappelley. He was having his breakfast and the morning paper at the breakfast bar.

Dr. Chappelley yelled above the noise of the garbage disposer, "I see in the paper they're investigating another one of those atomic scientists. Physicist or chemist or something."

"That girl next door," Mrs. Chappelley answered. "She didn't get in till four o'clock this morning. And then she stayed in the car with her boy friend till dawn."

Mrs. Chappelley had the common opinion of her kind that moral lapses always take place in the dark of night.

"I wouldn't trust any of those long-haired scientists," Dr. Chappelley yelled. "They're all subversive."

The garbage disposer roared happily as it crushed a piece of bone.

"I'd like to be her mother for just one hour," Mrs. Chappelley screamed.

"There was this physics professor when I was going to college. He admitted openly — right there in class — that he was going to vote for Norman Thomas. Back in 1928."

"I'd teach her a thing or two," Mrs. Chappelley screamed.

Dr. Chappelley yelled: "That was the only time I can remember that I knew what he was talking about. When he talked about physics, he could just as well have been saying, 'Wooggy wooggy woog-a-bunk vector,' for all I got out of it. I barely passed with a D."

It occurred to Dr. Chappelley that this might reflect on his intelligence, so he added, "He didn't know how to teach, and besides he was a long-haired . . ."

"I will not tolerate language like that in my house," said Mrs. Chappelley, showing that she paid some attention to her husband's remarks after all.

"The sugar bowl's empty," Dr. Chappelley howled.

Mrs. Chappelley turned to fill it, and howled louder. "What is that?"

"What is what?" asked Dr. Chappelley, who now was deep in his favorite columnist, Eastlake Paranoid.

"That," said Mrs. Chappelley.

"What?" asked Dr. Chappelley.

Dr. Chappelley at last tore himself from Paranoid's interesting theory that all public libraries should be closed because they entice innocent children into reading books when they ought to be out selling newspapers and shining shoes and becoming red-blooded Americans.

Illustrator: Ed Emsh

Then Dr. Chappelley saw what his wife saw. He saw it sitting on the next stool of the breakfast bar.

(There were, by the way, four stools at the bar. Two were for the Chappelleys' two sons, who were at the university. They were studying respectively funeral direction and supermarket administration.)

The creature on the stool smiled politely.

Dr. Chappelley adjusted his glasses and carefully examined it. It had long arms and long legs and its feet were like hands. It was covered with a very fine silvery fur that seemed to have a life of its own. Ripples passed through the fur across the creature's body, making light or dark paths as sunlight from the window was reflected or absorbed.

Across the creature's furry face ideas swept. Large eyes looked out at the world with wonder but with confidence. Its ears, which were bare, twitched to catch the sounds of life.

"It's a monkey," Dr. Chappelley announced.

"It's disgusting," Mrs. Chappelley said. "You know I don't like monkeys."

"You really shouldn't talk about me as if I weren't here," the creature said gently. "Besides, I'm not a monkey."

For some reason this mild rebuke terrified the Chappelleys. Mrs. Chappelley backed against the sink. If she could have, she would have backed through it. She reached behind her and turned off the garbage disposer, no doubt to regain a feeling of controlling events. Dr. Chappelley, on the other side of the breakfast bar, had jumped from his stool and backed into the dining room.

"You're both behaving very oddly," said the creature. "But that is characteristic of your species."

Dr. Chappelley decided that this was one of the occasions when there was no harm in a drink, sociable or not. He picked up the decanter of decorative port, which had been sitting on the buffet for three years, and took a long swig right out of the decanter.

Like all near-teetotalers, Dr. Chappelley had an exaggerated idea of the effect of alcohol; so he felt the effect immediately. He strode back to the breakfast bar and said indignantly, "Since you're so smart, tell me what kind of animal you are if you're not a monkey."

"Oh, if you want a name, I'll give you one according to your system. *Praeternaturalis argenteus* will do very well."

"It won't do at all," Dr. Chappelley said. Abruptly he changed the subject. "How did you get in here?" he demanded.

"I took advantage of a twist in space-time, very loosely speaking.

You see, when you said, 'Wooggy and-so-on vector,' you caused a specific disturbance of the molecules of the atmosphere that started a series of causative phenomena of which the twist in space-time was an epiphenomenon."

"A fine fairy tale," said Mrs. Chappelley, who wasn't going to be less brave than her husband. Anyway, she now thought that this was just some kind of a monkey that a mad scientist had taught how to talk. She knew all about mad scientists from the comic books her sons left lying around during their vacations from the university.

"A fairy tale," the *Praeternaturalis argenteus*, as it called itself, repeated amiably. "That is not far from the truth. You remember the potent words in your fairy tales and folklore. Rumpelstiltskin. Open sesame. The nine magical names of God.

"Your mythmakers sensed what words can do. Sometimes people by accident blurt out words of power — as your husband did — and have surprising experiences."

"That's what my wife meant," said Dr. Chappelley.

"I did not —"

"Be quiet, dear. When I was a little boy, I loved fairy tales," Dr. Chappelley lied. "As I understand you, you are something like a good fairy or a jinni, though of course you have given a clear scientific explanation."

Whatever his opinion of scientists, Dr. Chappelley respects Science.

The praeternaturalis opened its mouth. But it didn't get a chance to say anything.

Dr. Chappelley went on: "Now that I've said the magic words, I suppose that you will give me anything I ask for. First of all, I want a new Cadillac —"

"— with built-in television," Mrs. Chappelley added. She hasn't given up the mad-scientist theory, but she wasn't taking any chances. "And a new house — a bigger one," she said. "A palatial residence electronically designed for living, with an old-fashioned respectful couple to do the housework and cooking."

"Don't interrupt. I was coming to the house. Put it on the list," he ordered the praeternaturalis. "And fix me up with a simple but comfortable lodge in beautiful scenic country excelling in hunting and fishing."

Once more the praeternaturalis tried to speak, but Dr. Chappelley rattled on. "It will take some time to work out all our needs in detail. As a stopgap, I'd like to have some spending money right now, fixed so the Bureau of Internal Revenue can't get at it to support a lot of shiftless no-goods, especially foreigners, who won't work for what

they want. Say a million dollars to start with."

"I am afraid there has been a misunderstanding," the praeternaturalis said at last. "I am not a good fairy or a jinni out of a bottle or a leprechaun. I have come from my world, very loosely speaking, not to give you things but to give you words."

"Words?" Dr. Chappelley's round face was trembling with his disappointment. But he realized quickly that he might as well get what he could; so he brought his face under control. "You mean a magic phrase that can change lead into gold, or something like that? That would be useful, too. Will you have some port? — I am not a drinker, really, but I don't think there is any harm in an occasional sociable drink. Or some coffee? Get the nice praeternaturalis some coffee, dear."

"I'll make him some fresh," said Mrs. Chappelley. She turned the dials on the Koffee-Master.

The praeternaturalis politely held up its hands to Mrs. Chappelley as she set a clean cup on the breakfast bar, and it politely held up its feet to Dr. Chappelley, who was pouring a glass of port.

"No, thank you, both. Caffein and alcohol don't affect us. When we want to be stimulated, we pour an alkaline solution on our fur. When we want to relax, we use an acid solution."

"How interesting," Dr. Chappelley said, "Physiology fascinates me. You were speaking of some words you were going to give us."

"Of course. We have an advanced technology of words; and a few of us — although our friends call us sentimental — have been wanting for a long time to use our skill to do something for your species. But we haven't been able to visit you. Very loosely speaking, we have to come from the outside and a twist in space-time has to be generated inside. Fortunately, you generated one."

"It was nothing." Dr. Chappelley cocked his head to show his interest in the next thing the praeternaturalis had to say. He also uncovered his shining teeth, which his assistant, a Miss Jacqueline Smith, had to clean every three months on her own time.

"Our worders make at their wordbenches not only words with mass-energy effects — your magic phrase for turning lead into gold would be an example — but also words with moral effects. On the whole, we prefer to make the latter. I am not denying the mass-energy basis of psychological processes, but I am simplifying a distinction. Do you follow me?"

Dr. Chappelley nodded suspiciously. He sneaked a shrewd look into the wide eyes of the praternaturalis, and gazed heavenward.

"If Mrs. Chappelley and I had a way of making gold, we could do so much good for the poor unfortunates of this world. If we had — also — a word to reform evildoers and heal sick minds, we could do even more good."

"Juvenile delinquents," said Mrs. Chappelley.

"Broken homes," said Dr. Chappelley.

"Alcoholics," said Mrs. Chappelley.

"What are the words?" asked Dr. Chappelley.

"They are a series of connected words," said the praeternaturalis, "as follows: 'We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.'"

The Chappelleys were disturbed.

"Those aren't words to make gold?" Dr. Chappelley asked.

"No."

"They're not moral either," Mrs. Chappelley said. "Those words won't do anything for juvenile delinquents, broken homes, and alcoholics. If anything, they'll encourage them."

"They're subversive," Dr. Chappelley said, deciding that nothing useful would be got out of the creature. Dr. Chappelley was a man of principle and always said what he thought, when he couldn't lose anything.

Now the praeternaturalis was disturbed, which it showed by bending down one bare ear. "I don't understand. Our worders assured me that the words were specially designed for *Homo sapiens* and would be very effective."

"Not on a red-blooded homo Americanus!" Dr. Chappelley cried.

"That remains to be seen. Perhaps you two are an inadequate sample. If you will excuse me, I will wander around and try them on some other specimens."

"You mean you are going out and preach that immoral, subversive gibberish?"

"I'm afraid it's coated."

"I am sentimental."

Mrs. Chappelley, while taking part in the conversation, had been busying herself with little housewifely tasks on the other side of the breakfast bar. Filling salt cellars. Wiping the inside of a jelly lid. Pouring white vinegar — the Chappelleys drenched all their food with it — into a cruet.

She was holding the open bottle. She reached across the bar and poured a quart of vinegar on the praeternaturalis' head.

The praeternaturalis said, "Wooggy wooggy . . ." and slumped sound asleep on the bar like an old drunkard.

"I remembered that vinegar was an acid solution," Mrs. Chappelley said proudly.

"What the hell did you do that for?"

"I won't be sworn at, and it was my simple duty."

Dr. Chappelley's lower lip was shaking. "It's liable to wake up angry, and after all it may have powers we don't know anything about. Besides, I think it was calling for help before it fell asleep. It started to say, 'Wooggy wooggy woog-a-bunk —"

"Shut up," Mrs. Chappelley screamed, just in time. They looked at each other for a while, and she said: "You remember those knives Uncle Walter gave us for Christmas? I was trying out the new electric sharpener on them only last night."

"But it's almost human. It can talk and everything."

Mrs. Chappelley opened a drawer and pulled out a long black case.

Dr. Chappelley spoke more to himself than to his wife. "When you look at its fur and its feet, it is no better than an animal; and it doesn't even wear clothes. And if you do try to stretch a point and think of it in the same way as a human being, then it's an immoral, subversive alien. We would only be doing our duty; our clearly apparant duty."

"Stop talking and take this." Mrs. Chappelley handed him a knife.

The creature's silvery fur rippled and glinted, but more slowly in sleep. Dr. Chappelley nervously pushed back his starched cuffs and stabbed the *Praternaturalis argenteus*, as it called itself, through the neck.

Its fur moved yet more slowly, and was still: like the fur of a limp cat in a gutter.

"We should have remembered to put newspapers on the floor," Mrs. Chappelley said.

"What shall we do with it?" Dr. Chappelley asked.

"Men are so helpless around a kitchen," Mrs. Chappelley said sharply.

She turned on the garbage disposer.

THE SIREN SOUNDS AT MIDNIGHT

BY FRANK M. ROBINSON

Since the perfection of the atom bomb, many fiction writers have been accused of being prophets of doom. They have annihilated, maimed, and mangled the earth and most of its inhabitants so often that many readers have already died quite often while waiting for the real thing to turn up.

Thus, stories on this theme have two strikes against them when they arrive in our office. But writers like Frank Robinson look on taboos as a challenge. In this case, Frank needed but one strike to connect.

"WHAT time is it?" she asked.

"About six o'clock." He glanced at the kitchen clock. "Five minutes to," he corrected.

"We've got about six hours then, haven't we?"

"Just about."

She ran the rag across the dish and sudsed it up and down in the warm water. "It seems kind of foolish to stand here and do the dishes."

"It wouldn't do any good to run." He finished drying the dish he had in his hands, then put down his towel and took her wet hands in his. "Are you frightened?"

She looked up at him and for the hundredth time that day he considered how fortunate he was. It had been forty years or more and her hair had faded to silver and the once young face had become seamed and lined, but the look in her eyes had never changed.

"I'm trying not to be," she said, but her voice trembled slightly. She clutched his hands for a moment longer, then went back to the dishes. "Do you think it had to come to this?"

"I suppose it had to come to a showdown sometime," he said thoughtfully.

"You don't think that perhaps . . . they'll compromise."

He had lied to her many times in the past, he thought. Once, a long time ago, just a few years after they were married, he had lied. A black lie, which she quietly discovered and for which she quietly forgave him, and he had lived under the burden of the lie and hadn't discovered her forgiveness until years later. And once a white lie, the time when little Joseph had been so sick.

But now there was time for only the truth.

"I don't know," he said truthfully. "I think, perhaps, they've forgotten how to compromise."

She was washing the frying pan now, rubbing the steel wool over it as if it was the last time she was ever going to clean it.

"How bad . . . are the bombs?" she asked.

He didn't want to tell her, it wouldn't do her any good. But then, perhaps she had a right to know.

"They're the new ones," he said quietly. "The ones that blanket a whole area, not just a city."

"I was reading in the paper," she said. "A scientist, I think. And he said that this time they could end . . . everything."

"I know."

She ran cold water into the sink and watched the soap bubbles break and disappear and the white curd run down the drain.

"I don't understand," she said. "Some people say the sirens at city hall will sound at nine, and others say midnight."

"Midnight our time," he explained. "If they reach a compromise, there won't be any sirens at all. If they don't, then the sirens will sound at midnight."

"And then?"

He shrugged. "It won't be long after that."

She wiped her hands and he saw with a pang that they were red and wrinkled and thought of how many times he had made a half promise to buy her a dishwasher. There were so many things he had wanted to get her, so many things he had wanted to do for her. But he was always going to do it tomorrow, and now they had run out of tomorrows.

"We'll have to be going in a little while," he said.

She hung up her apron. "What time do the services start?"

"Seven, I think."

"I want to look at the house first," she said.

Houses, he thought, were memories more than they were wood and plaster. The dining room set they had bought on time so long ago and which had taken years to pay for, the bridge table at which they had entertained Ted and Irma so many times during the winter months, the spare bedroom he had added to the house

Illustrator: William Ashman

when Joseph had been born.

And other things. The leaky faucet he had promised he would fix all last year, the screen door with the screening torn loose at the bottom, and the sagging walls on the coal bin that needed bracing.

He wouldn't have time to fix them now, he thought, and then smiled to himself. In a way, he was almost relieved.

His wife was ready to go. She looked small and dowdy in her worn coat and hat and he had another flash of regret. A little white-haired old lady, slightly stooped and frail, in a hat and coat ten years out of date. She could have married a man who would have provided for her so much better than he, he thought, and wondered why she hadn't.

She was standing in the living room, taking one last look, to be sure the scene was impressed on her memory. She walked over to one of the end tables and ran her finger lightly over the thin film of dust, then turned to him and managed a smile.

"I guess it's time to leave," she said.

Out on the porch she asked: "What time is it?"

"A quarter to seven."

She sounded relieved. "We've got five hours then."

It was a warm spring night, the kind of night that had always meant the beginning and not the end. The street lamps had just come on and wore bright haloes of light under the thick archway of trees that lined the street.

He stood on the porch steps for a moment, anxiously scanning the myriad of stars that flickered and burned overhead, searching for the tell-tale flutter of flame that would mark one of the rocket-missiles. But it was too early. The deadline was still hours away, and no nation would dare to do anything before then. It wouldn't be legal, and such things always had to be done legally.

"It's a nice night," he said. "Let's walk."

They started down the porch steps. He remembered that he hadn't locked the front door but he didn't bother going back.

The neighbors were drifting up the street in twos and threes, making small talk among themselves and nodding quietly to each other as they passed. On the corner, Harry Brown had pulled the shades in his tavern and was just locking up for the night.

He wouldn't have recognized Harry, not without his bow-tie and white shirt and apron. In a worn, brown business suit Harry looked like anybody else except, perhaps, more worried and tired looking.

"I should think they would have lots of business tonight," his wife said in a low voice.

He shook his head. "No, not tonight. You drink for your illusions." He paused. "I think there is a night in everyone's life when you have to see yourself as you actually are, without your illusions to touch up the job. Tonight's that sort of night."

They could have been kinder to the Browns, he thought, as they walked on by. The whole neighborhood could have. You bought your beer there and you were friends over the counter, but a tavern keeper and his wife weren't people you invited into your home, or so the social code went.

He wondered how lonely the Browns must have been, how much they must have hated it there.

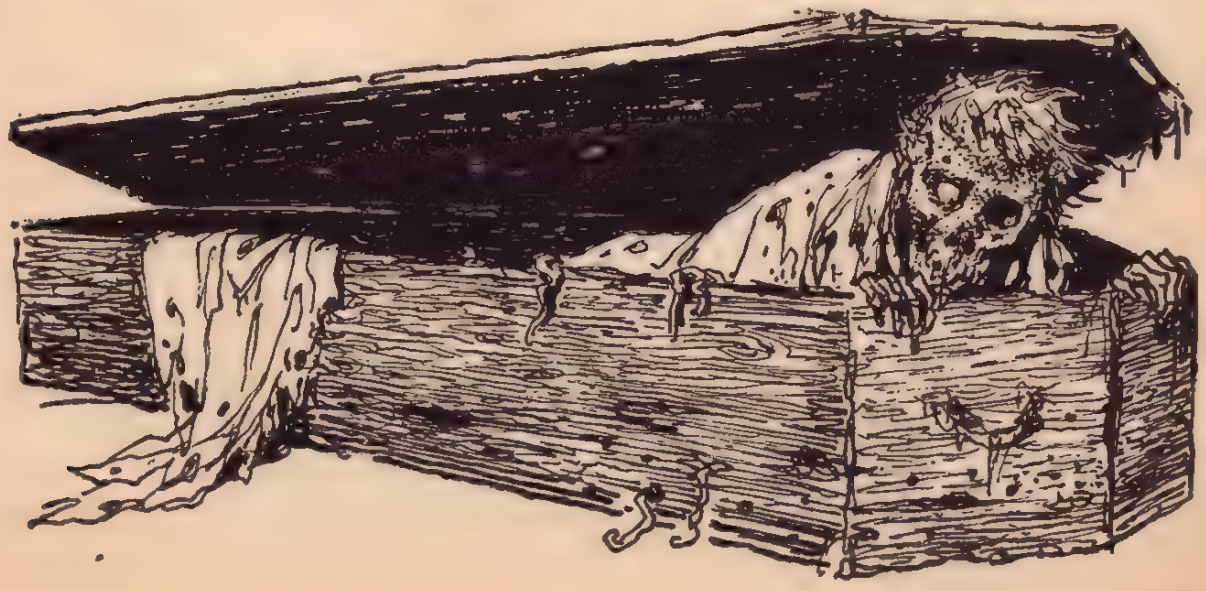
The church was crowded. He couldn't remember having seen such a crowd in church even for the Christmas or the Easter service. All the folding chairs at the back were taken but the people who still streamed in didn't seem to be bothered by the standing room only.

Everybody was there, he thought. Old people and young people and people they hadn't seen for months. There were rows of high school boys who looked oddly intent and wide awake, along with girls who had giggled and shrieked their way home from school every afternoon dressed in blue jeans and loafers. They were soberly dressed and wore an almost adult composure now. And there were little children who were either red-eyed and still or were sobbing quietly in their mother's arms, not understanding what was going on.

They sang *Rock of Ages* and *Lead, Kindly Light* and all the verses of *Jerusalem.*

The minister chose his sermon from the Twenty-Third Psalm.

Yea, though I walk through the



valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

Everybody was there, he thought again. Even Parker Wright, the colored man who usually went to the Baptist church at the edge of town. But tonight nobody had time to observe the unwritten laws.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

The minister spoke the words he found in his heart, and then announced a silent prayer. At the end, he invited those who wished to stay to remain, while the others left.

"Let's go."

His wife looked at him questioningly.

"I have to walk," he said kindly. "I have to think."

They saw Joseph and his wife at the door, but the couple didn't wait for them.

"You could have said something," she said.

"No, no, he wouldn't have heard me."

"I think he would have heard this time."

"Perhaps next time," he said, and then remembered with a sudden bitterness that there wouldn't be a next time.

He could have been a better father to his children, he thought. He could have been nicer to his son's wife, of whom he had never fully approved, though now he couldn't remember why.

"Where do you want to go?" his wife asked quietly.

"The park," he said. He smiled down at her. "It reminds me of a long time ago."

"What time is it?"

"Eleven o'clock."

They sat on a bench in the park and felt the evening chill steal upon them but they didn't move. Couples strolled along the pathway hand in hand, their faces grim or tender as the case might be. Below the pathway and the benches was a small, grassy glade. It was almost filled now with the shadowy figures of people and the still red fireflies of lit cigarettes.

"I feel sorry for them," his wife said, nodding at a passing young couple. "They have so much more to lose than we have."

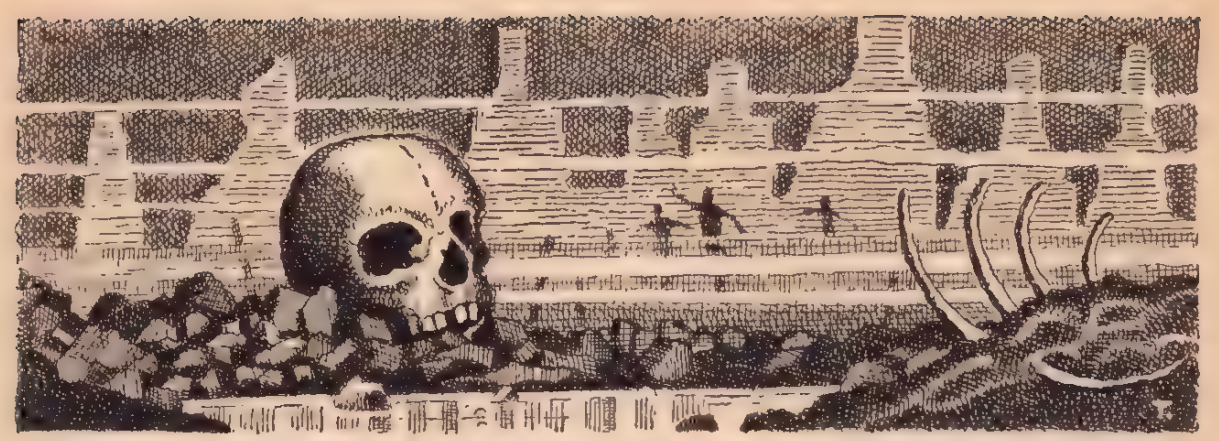
"It's been a good life."

"It depends," she said simply, "on how you've lived it."

Had it been a good life? he thought abstractly. Or had it been only past regrets and future fears, as some poet had put it?

No, he thought. It had been a good life. But you had to be an old man to know just how good.

He dozed and dreamed back to the small quiet lakes in northern Wisconsin where he had spent so



many happy summers as a boy, to the smell of the pine trees and the feel of the dry needles crunching beneath his feet when he had taken long walks through the woods. The feeling of satisfaction when he had a full catch of fish; the sun sinking in the lake at night-fall, glinting in fading little pools of red across the surface as the waves mirrored it for an instant.

"What were you thinking?"

"Just dreaming," he said, "of when I was young."

"So was I."

They were quiet for a moment, alone with their thoughts, yet sharing them.

"What did you like the best?" he asked.

She thought about it. "The people," she said at last. "I think I liked the people."

The people, he thought. The meek who were supposed to inherit the earth and who had made such a mess of it.

"Do you think," he burst out, "do you think if we had it to do all over again that it would be any different? That people would live and let live? Or do you think it would turn out to be just like it is now?"

"I think," she said, "that it would be nice to have another chance."

Another chance, he thought. Another chance to love thy neighbor and do unto others as you would have them do unto you. He smiled.

He lapsed into a moody silence, then: "Why did you marry me?" he asked suddenly.

She smiled in the darkness.

"Because I loved you."

"What time is it?" she asked.

"Midnight."

She shivered slightly and he put his arm around her shoulders and felt her relax under the reassuring pressure.

"I'm not afraid," she said quietly.

"Shh."

He cocked an ear.

"Listen."

The night was still.

Methuselah, Ltd.

By WALLACE WEST AND RICHARD BARR

When you read this story, you will no doubt enjoy it and then tell yourself: Of course, it couldn't really happen. But can you be really sure? We've seen, in our own time and in the past, to what far ends absolute dictatorship can go. Who is to say what the iron-heeled fanatic will or will not do? Time, and the one-track mind of the tyrant, can bring about terrible changes. The answer is vigilance.

"RATS!" Dr. Karl Weinkopf yanked off his smock and hurled it into a corner. "Mice! Guinea pigs! Fish! One moth-eaten ape! How can a man conduct decent experiments with such miserable specimens?"

He was growling so ferociously that the inhabitants of cages lining the walls of his makeshift laboratory hushed their squeaking. As though caught in some fault, the chimpanzee thrust an apologetic paw through the bars.

His rage abating, Weinkopf shook hands solemnly with the little fellow. Then he turned to study a pike that was trying to break through a glass partition so it could make a meal of the fat salmon in the same tank.

"There's our answer, Chimpo," the physician told the monkey. "Piker is 213 years old today if that tag on his tail doesn't lie. Sammy will be 105 come next January . . . if that partition holds. God alone knows the age of this wretched Italian carp. He may have been eating rebellious slaves in some patrician's pool back in Nero's day."

Weinkopf poked a spatulate finger into the tank; jerked it back in time to escape amputation as the pike made a white-toothed lunge.

"Told you," he said with a lopsided grin. "Piker's as spry as ever."

A nurse, whose costume set off a well-rounded, long-legged body, stuck her curly brown head through the lab door.

"Did you call, doctor?"

"No . . . Yes!" He studied

her as though she were a particularly succulent guinea pig. "How old are you, Miss Lara?"

"Why . . ." She blushed as only girls with freckles can. "I'm over 21."

"Tut! Mine was a scientific inquiry."

"Fifty . . . three, sir." The nurse looked ready to burst into tears as she confessed an age that belied her looks by a full quarter century.

"Humph! And how old would you guess that I am?"

"I . . . I never had thought about it," she lied. "It's not polite to guess at ages."

"Be impolite then!"

"Maybe . . ." She stared at the floor. "Say forty-five. Fifty at most."

"Thank you." Unconsciously he straightened his archaic bow tie. "I'm eighty-eight."

"No!" She looked at him now; at his athletic figure, hawk nose, blond hair untouched by grey, unlined skin. There was a great pity in her blue eyes.

"You know what that means? I have another two, three, possibly five years."

"No!" She put slim hands to her throat. "You're America's best diagnostician. It's not right."

"Chances are 99 out of 100 I'll be dead as a mackerel . . . no, not a mackerel . . . dead as a mouse within five years. But this fellow won't be dead!" He pointed at the pike as Consuelo Lara stood stricken. "If my successor keeps him free of parasites, doesn't let him tangle with the carp, and feeds him properly, Piker will live indefinitely."

"When I was a little girl," the nurse giggled, "we sang about how 'fish never perspire.' So they don't expire either. From old age, I mean."

"Rather like songs in that respect." He regarded her curiously. "The one you referred to dates from the Gay 1890's, doesn't it?"

"I wouldn't know." There was that telltale blush again. "But tell me, doctor, why don't fish die of old age?"

"They never got in the habit of it."

"But humans did?" she puzzled as he donned his old fashioned coat and motioned for her to precede him up the basement stairs while he double-locked the lab door.

"All animals seem to have got that habit about the time they crawled out of the sea," he replied as they reached his private office and he began leafing through his appointment book. "Hmmm. So Bobby Jones chopped off his right forefinger again, did he? The masochistic little beast."

"Yes, doctor. I signed your name to a routine order sending him to the Life Ray Clinic. His monkeyshines are getting monotonous, don't you think?"

"Definitely. Tomorrow I'll recommend psychiatric treatment for him and maybe his parents as well. You told them to bring him here weekly until the finger has grown back, of course?"

"Of course." She fluffed her bright hair and put on her street coat over the uniform. "But you were saying . . . about the old age habit?"

"Oh yes. The going was rough when the first vertebrates crawled up on shore. Food was scarce. And the poor, soft things must have dehydrated in the boiling sunshine. Some of them, like the whales, scrambled back into the womb of mother sea, regaining their immortality at the expense of further evolution. Whatever consciousness the others had wouldn't admit defeat. They continued to flap around. If they escaped starvation or a violent death they eventually wrinkled up and died . . . from frustration maybe. And they passed that frustration along to their offspring."

"You mean that's the reason why, even at birth, a baby's hands, feet and face have age lines on them?"

"Smart girl! Where did you pick that up? . . . Hello! What's this? 'Adelaide Hawley: Catarrhal inflammation of the intestines; enlargement of Peyer's patches; eruption on the abdomen and chest of rose-colored spots; diarrhea.' What's the fool woman been doing? Drinking branch water straight? Those are symptoms of typhoid fever."

"Amazing, isn't it? New York's first recorded case of typhoid in a century and a half. I should have sent her to the Clinic, I suppose, but she's still ambulatory. I told her to come back tomorrow so you could see for yourself."

"I don't know what I'd do without you, Miss Lara. Have to give up my experimental work, I suppose."

"Excuse me, doctor." The nurse linked her fingers and twisted them nervously. "Of course it's none of my business, but what kind of experiments are you doing down there?"

Weinkopf cocked his handsome head and studied her quizzically.

"Well," he said finally, "I suppose I owe you a truth for a truth. But you must promise never to breathe a word of it within a mile of a Medicop."

"I promise."

"I'm doing some surgical work . . . vivisection, in fact."

"Surgery!" She backed away from him until she bumped into a wall. "But that's forbidden."

"Quite."

"You're a criminal!"

"Among other things. You may resign if you desire, but I have your promise not to inform on me."

"Oh no." She pressed the knuckles of her fists to her mouth. "I'll never leave you. Never! But why risk euthanasia for the sake of cutting up a few guinea pigs?"

"I'm trying to break a habit."

"A habit? You mean. . . ?"

"My dear." He walked over to where she cowered and placed his hands on her shoulders. "I know you're in love with me. Don't forget that you said I was the best diagnostician in America. I also know it wouldn't be hard for me to fall in love with you . . . if I had a few more years to live. So bear with me and my criminal tendencies." He kissed her quickly and stalked out of the office.

Hands deep into his pockets against the October evening chill, Dr. Weinkopf walked southward through East River Park in the direction of the New Jersey Monorail station. What a fool, at his age, to be thinking about a woman. He must be as flighty as his name implied.

But he wasn't old, physically . . . not a day older than when he had matured at thirty or so. No lesions. No disease damage. No hardening arteries. No degeneration of function. The Life Ray saw to that.

Within two to five years, nevertheless, his circulation would slow; his heart action would become erratic and feeble. One fine morning, unless he went mad first, he would be found dead in bed "of natural causes" as the front page obituaries put it. "Unnatural, bullheaded, stupid, atavistic causes" would be better.

"Why?" he snarled at a squirrel. It flirted its tail and skittered through the fallen leaves.

Yes, why? It had all started with Ponce de Leon's deadly search for the Fountain of Youth. Then there had been the half-mythical, half-mad Dr. Carrel. He had kept animal tissues alive in sterile nutrient solutions for some fantastic period. That had led to the growing of chickens and other animals in germ-free cages and finally to the idiotic episode of the Incubator Man. He, too, Weinkopf recalled with a grimace, had chased after a skirt in his young-old age — and had died of measles, or something similar, a few days after escaping from his "incubator."

Long before that though, in the 1940's, Dr. Waksman dug up streptomycin and the other antibiotics, which eventually eradicated disease. The final step had come in the '90's when Paiewonsky had crowned Professor Scott's painstaking lifework on the regeneration of human tissues by building the first Life Ray machine . . . the still half-understood gadget that somehow made it possible for a human, like a lizard, to regrow a severed leg or repair any other damaged organ,

from a liver to a pituitary gland.

"And what was the result of those and other wonders?" he asked a lamp post.

Life expectancy at birth crept from a meagre 45 years in 1900 to 68 in 1950 and to 70 a decade later. In the peaceful One World of the final third of a century it jumped to 80 despite alarming increases in the accident rate and in degenerative diseases, such as arteriosclerosis, that could not be traced to germs or viruses.

After use of the regenerative Life Ray machines became universal around 2003, expectancy hit 90.

But at that point, when the age-old dream of immortality seemed on the verge of becoming a reality, the expectancy curve flattened out. Men and women matured in their thirties. They maintained their good looks and vitality for some 60 years more. Then, for no apparent reason, they just lay down and died as though their life clocks had become unwound.

A pitiful minority lived a few years beyond four score and ten, although none approached the record age of 169 set in England by Henry Jenkins back in 1670. They didn't even threaten the American mark of 145 made in 1895 by Dr. William Hotchkiss of St. Louis. Others failed to reach the nine decade limit: Large numbers continued to be killed outright in accidents, or to commit suicide.

"But on balance," Dr. Weinkopf addressed the rows of skyscrapers to his right, "babies born in this year of grace 2098 can expect to live not a day longer than those who saw the light in 2003.

"It doesn't make sense," he growled, ignoring the glances of passersby. "Somewhere in the human body there must be a gland, a chain of reflexes, perhaps an ancestral memory path, that turns the furnace off when it believes the organism has outlived its usefulness. I know where it is. If I could work in an oldfashioned hospital surgery for a little while I could find and eliminate it."

He felt keyed up and angry; not in the mood for a swooping journey to his Jersey farm. He needed a drink. And somebody to drink with. How about Harrison? Not the best company in the world, but he was certain to be puttering around his office. Bachelors always did that, especially when they were going to be pushing up daisies in a year or two. . . .

"'Lo, Karl," Weinkopf's lean and mournful host did not bother to rise from his desk or even to separate the fingers which he held, tent-fashion, across his narrow chest. "Dial for the drinks, will you? I'm spent."

"What's the trouble this time,

Neil?" The visitor pressed buttons and, when the frosted Scotches arrived, placed one in front of Harrison.

"One of my most lucrative patients . . . that Mrs. Peyton of the Park Avenue Peytons I've told you about . . . insisted on having an operation; an appendectomy, to be exact. If that couldn't be arranged she was willing to settle for a tonsil job. She just left." He drank deeply.

"Masochism? I have a nasty case, too." The Scotch tasted suddenly flat.

"Not this time. You see, Mrs. Payton reads books."

"I don't understand." Karl lit his pipe, another anachronism he liked to affect.

"Old books," the other amended. "She ran across a dogeared tome by some Englishman named Wodehouse. Ever hear of him?"

"Can't say I have."

"Well, it seems he wrote light novels about lightminded people. One such element was always talking about her symptoms and her operations. Mrs. Peyton would like to relieve the tedium of her life by doing likewise."

"Of course you told her that operations are illegal . . . that the penalty for any doctor caught performing one is euthanasia."

"I told her. She replied that she was willing to pay a thousand LH for the thrill."

"You were firm?"

"I was adamant . . . until she said she was going to change physicians . . . that a friend had told her about an oh-so-sympatico Dr. Weinkopf up on the East River Drive. I couldn't allow her to tempt you with a thousand free Labor Hours, could I?"

"Perhaps not . . . Shall we have two more of these?"

"Naturally. And make 'em doubles this time."

"So?" asked Weinkopf when the order popped out of its pneumatic tube.

"So I'm going to operate. I need an expensive vacation."

"You? You can't even open an oyster without cutting yourself. And even if you were a surgeon, where are you going to get instruments, anesthetics, a nurse you can trust, even an operating table, without having the Medicops down on you?"

Harrison tapped his fingertips together lazily.

"Ever hear of the S.P.S.T?" he asked.

"That bunch of sadists?" Weinkopf stared in genuine horror. "Oh come now, Neil. A joke's a joke. Besides, the Medicops euthed the last of that gang three years ago."

"Don't believe anything you read in the newspapers. The Ancient and Dishonorable Society for the Preservation of Surgical Techniques is still around. In

fact, I am a member in bad standing."

Weinkopf tossed his second drink into the disposall, untasted, and stood up.

"I'll be going," he said stiffly.

"Oh, come now, Karl. Stop acting like a conditioned reflex."

"I have a well-paying, legitimate practice. At my age I don't intend to jeopardize it by having the slightest contact with any subversive group."

"'Legitimate practice'" Harrison mimicked him. "'At my age.' 'Subversive.' Point one: If your practice is legitimate, what are you doing with a secret lab? Point two: At your age any man in his right mind shouldn't give much of a damn what happens to him, particularly if he felt there was an outside chance of keeping alive indefinitely. Point three: Remember the old story they tell on Abe Lincoln. 'Mr. President,' some wag once said to him, 'if you call a tail a leg, how many legs has a dog?' 'Four,' Honest Abe answered promptly. 'Calling a tail a leg don't *make* it a leg.'"

"Now order up another drink and sit down!"

"I don't know what you're talking about," Karl mumbled as he obeyed.

"I'm saying just this: The Society has its quota of sadists and crackpots but it isn't subversive just because the newspapers, the medical journals, the Medicops and even the government say it is. You'd realize that if you used the nonsense eliminator you carry around between your ears."

"But . . ."

"You know as well as I do that there's already one way of beating this death sentence we're facing . . . I'm in my eighties, too, remember."

"You mean the Life Sculptors." Weinkopf grimaced. "Oh, sure. If I had a million or so LH and swung enough political influence, the bio-chemists and their ilk could graft a new heart and a few other organs into me and keep me ticking for quite a while. What's that got to do with it?"

"Do you think the Big Shots who beat the death rap are anxious to share their luck with the commonality?"

"Naturally not. As it is, they run the show. If everyone's life span equalled theirs . . ." Mechanically, he retrieved his new drink and drained it.

"That's one point . . . Let's order dinner sent up, Karl. We have a lot to talk about. How would you like filigreed Yar? It's prime this month." Harrison bestirred himself to poke fastidiously at the keyboard connecting his office with the building restaurant.

"The other point is," he continued, "that the Powers-That-Be know the ghost of Malthus might be breathing down their

necks again if the life span is increased. Today they have a peaceful, stagnant solar system where production balances consumption. Say you double life expectancy. Probably you double population in a generation or so. Then the government would have to get off its tail and put real steam behind Interstellar. Can't have that!"

"I see what you mean." Weinkopf was overtaxing the air conditioner with blue clouds of tobacco smoke. "But why tell me all this? I might . . ."

"No you mightn't. I know about that secret lab of yours, remember."

"How did you find out?"

"How do you suppose?"

"Connie! But she promised."

"She promised not to report you to the Medicops. Connie is one of us. Wields a mean scalpel herself. She's been trying to get a blackmail line on you since you hired her."

"Blackmail!"

"Um." The big tube burped. Harrison sat, completely relaxed, as his guest removed the dishes, unsealed them and arranged food on the desk. "I'll be frank with you, Karl," he resumed after he had sampled the Yar. "The Society has reached a dead end. We've been barking up the wrong Tree of Life. We had a theory . . . those of us on the 'inside,' you understand . . . that old age was a disease, or maybe a slow starvation. For years we thought that some property in sea water . . . some chemical related to iodine, perhaps . . . was necessary to the indefinite prolongation of life. We've spent fortunes on analyses and experiments. We've got exactly nowhere."

"Where did you get the fortunes to spend?"

"From well-to-do sadists who get a kick out of watching illicit surgery. Here. Have some of this. It's delicious."

"Thanks. I'm not hungry. And now?"

"Now, when Connie called and told me you were working the other side of the street I had a hunch you might drop by. So I baited my best mousetrap."

"I wish you'd stop talking in riddles!" Weinkopf poked at his food.

"Very well. You, I gather, have developed a new line of attack. You believe old age is a mere habit. Let me make a guess and say you think senile death is an inherited tendency; a neural circuit set up ages ago when, if the species was to survive, organisms had to be disposed of after they stopped procreating. Couldn't waste good food on non-producers. Right?"

"Right." Weinkopf poured coffee and looked at his friend with new respect.

"Today human organisms no

longer wear out or lose their ability to procreate. But eventually, at around age 90, the old chain still clicks from force of habit. You've convinced yourself of *that* by vivisecting your little pets. But you can't prove it works with humans, or find a way of short-circuiting the chain, without doing real brain surgery."

"Of course not." Weinkopf's face had grown tense and white but the hand that held his coffee cup remained steady. "I know just what I'm after. In the old days I could have nailed it down with some post-mortems and a series of simple leucotomies on senile patients. But now, if a person is killed in an accident, or passes away in the so-called normal manner, the cadavers are cremated in a matter of hours. And people don't become senile in the clinical sense. I'll never have a chance to prove my theory."

"You will if you string along with me, Connie, and the real leadership of the S.P.S.T."

Weinkopf stared at the dregs in the bottom of his cup.

"All right," he said at last. "But how do I become a member? I thought an applicant had to bring a patient with him . . . one willing to undergo surgery."

"I'll forego that expensive vacation. Mrs. Peyton is yours. She's 90, you know."

"What if she talks?"

"She won't. That's one thing in our favor. The punishment for one who undergoes surgery is the same as for one who performs an operation. She wants to make a splash, not die under a cloud."

"It's not ethical." Weinkopf began pacing the floor.

"Is it ethical to slip laws into the statute books forbidding medical research? Is it ethical to condemn millions to death each year if there's a chance that life could be prolonged by such research? Is it ethical to freeze a civilization into status quo?"

"But the Hippocratic Oath . . . One slip and she'd die."

"If you'd rather not," Harrison looked at him under heavy lids, "I won't insist. No. You run along. I'll try a prefrontal lobotomy on Mrs. Peyton."

"Not prefrontal!" the other shouted. "Good God! You'd surely kill her." He saw that Neil was laughing. "All right," he said with a sickly grin. "You win."

During the week that elapsed before his scheduled initiation into the S.P.S.T., Dr. Weinkopf performed his regular duties in a perfunctory manner. He spoke to his nurse only when necessary and then in monosyllables. He was equally brusque with patients.

"Pain in your left side? Legs ache? Humph! Here's a ticket for the Life Ray. Three exposures

daily after meals. Intensity 3.8. That will be 25 LH. Goodbye."

He read the riot act to Bobby Jones and his neurotic parents. After their trembling departure he ventured to hope that, if Bobby were tempted to try another auto-amputation, he would experiment on his nasty little head.

He got Adelaide Hawley's typhoid in and out of the clinic in short order. And he came to detest the gushing, stupid, pretty Mrs. Peyton.

"Sure you want to go through with this?" he asked her once.

"Oh yes, doctor. Only surgery can help me. I've been and *been* to the clinic and I still feel terrible. I was saying to Anne just the other day . . . Anne's my gran . . . Anne's my *daughter*, Dr. Weinkopf . . . that I'll go *mad* if I don't find relief."

"Hmmm. What are your symptoms? Headaches?"

"Oh yes. Frightful headaches." She pressed beringed hands to her cranium.

"Here?" He touched her touched-up blond hair back of the right ear.

"Yes. How did you know? You're wonderful. Dr. Harrison never . . ."

"Sounds like a tumor."

"Is that bad?" Her pale eyes lost their boredom.

Could be. Its removal wouldn't hurt a bit though. You could watch me in a mirror if I operated under local anesthesia. Although," he added hastily, "I still think the Life-Ray could do the job better."

"Won't it hurt just a *little* bit? I've never been hurt in all my life."

"Perhaps I could arrange that."

"Then it's all settled." She jumped up and clapped her hands like a girl. "You make all the arrangements. And, oh yes, here is that release." She handed it to him and fairly skipped from the office.

The diagnostician sighed, tore the worthless release into pieces and resumed study of his precious dog-eared Gray's Anatomy. He knew that he was not a surgeon; merely a good veterinarian. He could operate on the lower animals with perfect aplomb. But would his hands shake; would he become panicstricken when he attempted a subtemporal on a human? Yet Mrs. Peyton was only the dreg of a woman. And, if he succeeded, he might extend her life for many years . . . worthless years.

"Miss Lara," he called.

"Yes, doctor?" She came meekly from the reception room.

"What will Mrs. Peyton do with an extra hundred years?" he snapped at her.

"That's not the proper question," Connie answered gravely. "Mrs. Peyton has been walking around dead for the past 60 years. She fluttered toward a doctor like a moth to the flame. Subcon-

sciously, she wants to get the farce over with so she can crawl into her grave."

"Not a bad diagnosis." He had to admire the girl despite her spying.

"The real question is . . ." She thrust out a dimpled chin, ". . . what you and the minority of people like you could do with that extra century."

"What could I do!" he breathed. "I'd have time to learn something; to become a scientist instead of a dilettante pecking at grains of wisdom like a rooster in a barnyard. But it bothers me that, if I succeed, I'll make it possible for the walking dead to come along for the ride. They won't grow mentally. Won't they impede evolution? They will remain young in appearance. They may have a worse influence on humanity than those dreadful Struldbrugs that Dean Swift wrote about — the people who never died but kept growing more and more senile and helpless as the ages passed."

"It has always been that way," she shrugged. "The first caveman to build a fire helped a lot of ballast to keep from freezing or dying from indigestible food. But he also kept himself, his wife and his bright children alive a little longer so they could evolve farther than they otherwise would have done."

"You're right," he said grudgingly. "But another thing worries me. If old age is a habit, or even a disease or hormone deficiency, why haven't some people been immune to it? The race owes its existence to the fact that a few people always were immune to, or survived, bad habits and diseases as horrible as the dancing mania or the Black Plague that swept Europe in the Middle Ages."

"I suspect that some people are immune to old age," she said. "Consider the Count of St. Germaine, Ambrose Pierce and Daniel Boone. Just try to find out when any of them died. A man doesn't advertise that he is supremely different from his fellows. They'd tear him up."

"Are you one of those?"

"Don't be ridiculous!" She blushed furiously.

"Cleopatra revived from the asp?" he teased. "Madame Pompadour feigning tuberculosis to escape the stupidities of Louis XV's court?"

"Pompadour with freckles?" she sniffed.

"My dear, the most beautiful woman I ever knew had a freckle on her left flank."

"You've been peeking!" she stormed.

Suddenly they were shouting with laughter. The coldness between them was forgiven and forgotten too.

A November wind with a prom-

ise of snow behind it was blowing Dr. Weinkopf through piles of dead leaves a week later to keep his rendezvous. He stopped under a street light to stare at those leaves, all headed away from the wind in rows of appalling regularity. They knew where they were going — into the East River. But where was he going?

If successful, he would revolutionize a world.

If he failed? He was acquainted with the S.P.S.T. rules. Neil had seen to that. If he failed, he climbed on the operating table himself. The Society buried its failures as certainly as old-time surgeons had done. That was its protection against exposure to the Medicops.

Was he up to it? He decided that he was. He would show them what any fool could have seen a century ago — if fools ever bothered to look beyond their noses.

He turned into a skyscraper entrance and walked down three flights of stairs. He rapped on the third door to the right. Two raps. Pause. Three more.

"Who comes in peace?"

"Brother Ambrose." He felt like one of the fools he had been jeering at.

"Enter, Brother."

A shadowy figure in a dunce cap that fell to the shoulder slapped a similar disguise on his head.

"Follow, Brother."

They traversed a corridor and, after another ritual, entered a dazzling room fitted up as a theater. Around a space holding operating table, surgical apparatus, oxygen equipment and a sterilizer, rose tiers of benches occupied by hooded figures. Why, thought the newcomer, a good percentage of the doctors in Manhattan must be present!

He was escorted to a seat on the innermost bench. He had thought that his was to be the star performance of the evening, but an operation already was in progress. It was a lithotomy on a young woman.

The hooded physician handled the instruments with a certain amount of skill. Yet there was too much blood in evidence for him to have had extensive experience. Once the attending nurse dropped a scalpel and had to fish through the sterilizer for a substitute.

"I will now," said the surgeon in an uncertain voice, "make this cut by the side of the anus into the peranaeum . . . There!" He applied clamps with fingers that twitched.

"Staff!"

This time the nurse did not fail him.

"Now," the man under the floodlights gulped, "I will reach in, divide the urethra and neck of the bladder and introduce this grooved, curved staff into the

bladder itself. The groove serves as a guide for my knife."

The nurse handed the instrument. The incision was made. The amateur inserted those trembling fingers to feel for the stone, stammering some explanation as he did so. He tried forceps, withdrew them and tossed them into the sterilizer. Swaying on his feet, he stitched frantically.

Weinkopf's lips curled.

The botched job done, the victim was wheeled away.

The man in the arena fainted.

"Well, gentlemen," said Dr. Harrison's voice from behind one of the masks, "what is your verdict?"

"I didn't see the stone," a querulous voice complained. "You don't get your money's worth if you don't see everything."

"That is a fair criticism. Any others?"

There was a mutter that might have signified anything.

"I'll call for a vote. Those in favor of admitting Brother Joaquin to the Society so signify."

Querulous thrust out a meager first with its thumb turned down.

Other votes were about equally divided.

"Brother Joaquin is admitted to membership, but on probation," Harrison ruled after a careful count. "He was guilty of gross clumsiness but that will be repaired by the Life Ray. Perhaps he may improve with practice."

"And now, Brothers," he continued after the first performer had been revived and led to an empty seat, "we have with us tonight a man whom all of you would recognize if he removed his hood. He plans a very delicate operation on the brain; one we never before have been privileged to witness. Ready, Brother Ambrose?"

Weinkopf stood up as Connie, wearing mask and cap, wheeled in the operating table with Mrs. Peyton's generous bulk under the sheet. He was amazed and pleased to find himself cool, collected and even slightly amused at the mumbo jumbo.

"I'm sorry, gentlemen," he said as he removed the hood and flipped it into a corner. "I can't see properly through that damned pillow case. I must add," he went on after the surprised murmurs had died away, "that I do not intend to deliver any lecture while operating. I will devote all my attention to my patient."

"I protest," someone shouted from the back benches. "This is entirely irregular. Don't trust this character. He's a Medicop spy."

"Nothing of the kind," Harrison sounded lazily amused. "I vouch for Dr. Weinkopf. Proceed, sir."

"I am going to perform a subtemporal with the object of open-

ing and curetting the pineal organ, or epiphysis," Weinkopf said quietly. "As you know, the pineal body is a small conical structure. It springs from the posterior part of the roof of the third ventricle and projects backward over the superior quadrigeminal bodies." He stammered to a halt as he noticed that, from the table, Mrs. Peyton was regarding him with the fascination of a suicidal bird for a snake.

"Some of the early twentieth century brain specialists thought that the epiphysis was a rudimentary third eye," he forced himself to go on. "They considered it a vestigial organ, like the vermiform appendix, which had lost whatever function it might once have had. I, on the other hand, after years of vivisection and careful study of the old, illegal texts, have convinced myself that the pineal organ is neither rudimentary nor vestigial. It is, instead, an amazingly accurate 90-year clock . . . the Clock of Life."

"Oh, come now, Weinie," someone jeered, "stop pulling our legs and start making with the cleaver."

"Order! Order!" Harrison shouted, angry for the first time that his friend could recall. "This is a scientific body, not a collection of butchers. Pray continue, doctor."

"I base my findings," Weinkopf went on tartly, "on the fact that the epiphysis of every adult animal that I have trephined contains within its supporting tissue a number of small spherical bodies consisting of calcareous salts. On section, these bodies show a concentric laminated structure vaguely resembling the rings that one can see on the stump of a cut tree."

"Are these nice big stones, doctor?" Querulous interrupted avidly.

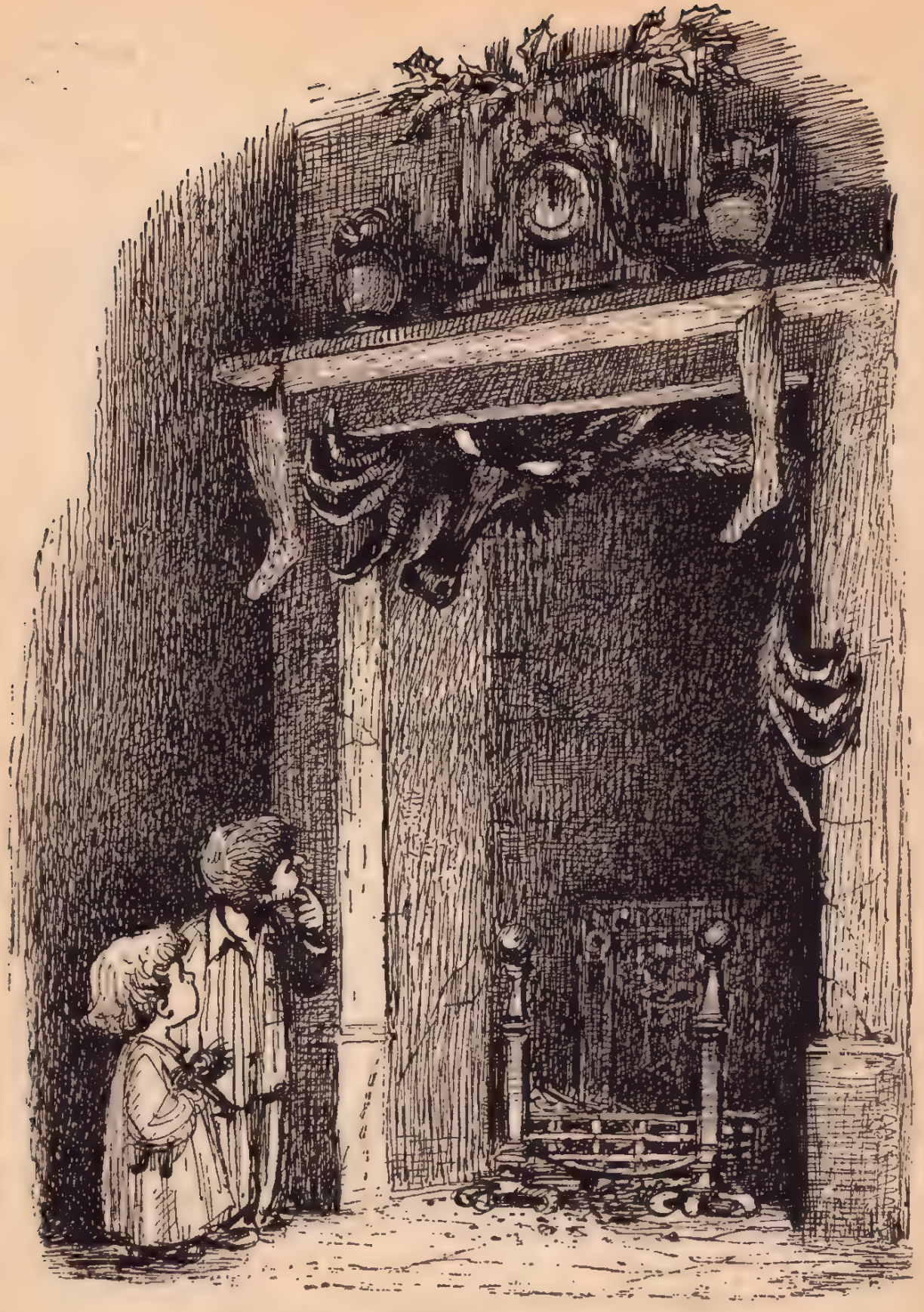
"I'm terribly sorry, doctor." Weinkopf stressed the last word. "They are microscopic."

"And what is your thesis?" Harrison cut in as the old man started to rise angrily from his bench.

"Just this: First, in senile animals this 'brain sand,' as it has been called, is found not only in the pineal organ but in the choroid plexuses, pia arachnoid and other parts of the brain . . ."

"Talk English, man," someone shouted impatiently. "We're not up on that jargon."

"Second, I never have been able to find a particle of such sand in the brain of any fish, no matter how old it may have been!" He paused while an excited murmur ran around the room. "Under the circumstances it seems a workable hypothesis that a critical concentration of brain sand, accumulated over the years, excites some neural or even physical complex which stops the heart. Remove



"But it doesn't LOOK like Santa Claus."

the sand by surgery or find a way of dissolving it in situ and human life may be prolonged indefinitely." He turned to the sink and began scrubbing his hands vigorously. "That is my thesis," he said over the sound of running water. "It may be an amateurish one, due to my lack of experience in practical surgery. Since your own experiments along the same line have failed, it seems, however, to be the only avenue of attack we have left . . . I am ready to proceed with the operation. It will be performed under a local anesthetic since the brain is insensitive to pain and the patient has expressed a desire to watch me work."

"Just a minute, Dr. Weinkopf," cried a hard voice.

He whirled, towel in hand, to find Mrs. Peyton sitting up, clutching the sheet around her to best advantage and swinging her trim ankles over the edge of the operating table.

"Just a minute," she repeated through set teeth. "Did I hear you say you might prolong my life indefinitely?"

"Why yes," he stammered, wondering what tack her giddy mind had flown off on. "The human body is much like a house, Mrs. Peyton. Keep it shingled, and painted, the foundation repaired, the furnace running, and there's no reason why it shouldn't last indefinitely. None whatever."

"There's that word again," she almost yelled at him while every hood in the theatre focused on her. "What does it mean in my case? Five years? Ten years?"

"Madame," he said placatingly, "if my theory is correct, there is no reason why you shouldn't live another century, or perhaps several centuries if you avoid an instantaneously fatal accident."

"Another century!" Her voice dropped to a croaking whisper. "One hundred years. Almost forty thousand days. Endless multitudes of leaden-footed hours. To play bridge in. To go to the Riviera in and wonder why I went there. To wash my teeth in. To wait for the 'phone to ring in but it never does so that I have to call up someone who detests me and make both of our lives miserable in. No!"

She was on her feet now, regal and Roman in the trailing sheet.

"No!" she repeated. "I was brought here on false pretences, to be operated on for a brain tumor. I didn't bargain for immortality. A few more years of life, yes. There are several thrills I haven't enjoyed. But I'll be no Mrs. Methuselah to please you bloodthirsty old dogs. Nurse! My clothes, if you please!"

She paced out, as if to slow music, savoring to the core of her being the roar of astonishment and delight that went up.

Harrison banged with a gavel until some sort of order was restored.

"Brothers," he said at last. "You know the rules. A neophyte who fails to operate forfeits his rights to life. That is the only way we can protect ourselves from imposters. It is for you to decide whether Weinkopf is to be euthed, the supreme penalty, or is to be operated on here and now by one of us."

The condemned man stared at the speaker with horrified amusement. Wasn't Harrison going to admit his own fault; tell the others that he had foisted Mrs. Peyton on them? But of course he wasn't! Instead he was calmly counting upraised and downward-thrusting thumbs.

"The vote is unanimously in favor of an operation on the neophyte," Harrison chortled. "The patient is granted only one boon. He may select any one of us he pleases to perform the operation and name any operation . . . any major operation, that he prefers."

"Take me. Take me," Querulous was shrieking. "I'll yank your gall bladder out slick as a whistle. "Take me."

"Pay no attention to that old coot," shouted the man behind him. "Take me. I've performed five . . ."

"Take me. Take me." Hands were waving on all sides. A few of the Brothers were jumping up and down like children. Weinkopf, revolted to the core, stood rooted in the midst of an excellent facsimile of the original Bedlam when Connie Lara, freed of Mrs. Peyton, returned to the theater.

"What is your choice, Weinkopf?" asked the inquisitor when his gavel had prevailed. "In case you are thinking of escape, let me assure you that this place is well guarded."

"The operation shall be the one previously scheduled," Karl answered. "Since I wouldn't trust any of you to bone a chicken, I choose this nurse to trephine me at my direction under local anesthesia."

"So be it." Harrison shouted the mob down. "Our Sister is competent. And Dr. Weinkopf deserves our respect. I will show that respect by acting as his interne." He stepped down from his seat. "Instruct me, doctor, on the arrangement of your equipment."

Half an hour later Weinkopf lay on the operating table under the shadowless lights. He wore the regulation white gown. The right side of his head had been shaved. Harrison was making last-minute adjustments on the clamps that held his limbs rigid and on the mirrors that would allow him to see every detail of the operation.

"Good luck, Connie," he said to the girl who stood over him.

"You'll do all right. Even if you fail, it won't matter. You or someone else can try again until you hit the jackpot . . . if there is one. Give me the local now."

The needle bit his scalp. Numbness followed it like a slow wave.

"Cut a large flap of skin and lay it back," he directed when anesthesia was complete.

She did the job neatly. He felt only a slight tickling. There was little bleeding.

"Split the fibres of the temporal muscle and clamp them back."

"You've had plenty of experience" he said as he watched her flying fingers.

"A long, long time ago, doctor. Don't compliment me yet."

"Now use the ring saw."

All hell broke loose as the power tool attacked his skull. There was no pain; only a cacophony of horrid sound.

"Perfect," he grimaced as the section loosened. "Separate the bone from the dura mater membrane covering the brain. Careful! Don't tear it. Cut it clean and lay it back. Eeeasy . . . So that's how my grey matter looks. Use the nibbling forceps now. . . . Brrrrr!"

"Should the brain bulge so much?"

"Certainly. The pressure is rather high. It will go back when you replace the osteo-plastic flap . . . Can you locate the pineal gland? That's it, right there beside the corpora quadregemina."

"And now, doctor?" He noted that violet smudges had developed under her eyes.

"Now you're on your own. Use the scalpel to cut through the blood vessels to the supporting tissue. Don't worry if there is a little bleeding.

"Good. Use the staff to divide the tissue. No, not that one! The staff to the right. That's it.

"Probe for bits of brain sand. Take your time . . . There's one! Got it!

"Deeper. Deeper. There should be a lot of it at my age. Don't be

afraid of hurting me. You can't. I'm as tough as Chimpo . . . He stood it . . . Hey! "What's the matter with those confounded lights?"

"Why, nothing, doctor." She stared at him, stark terror in those eyes.

"I thought they flickered. Go on. Go on! Keep probing! We'll lose our audience." He essayed a chuckle. "Damn those lights. I tell you . . ." His voice changed to a croak. "Adrenalin! Oxygen! Qui. . . ."

The lights were out now and he no longer could feel the hard mattress of the operating table. He was rolling . . . rolling slowly like a mill wheel down a black and echoing tunnel. Oxygen starvation? Heart block? Or had Connie just poked too deeply into the Life Clock and set its broken gears and wheels whirring madly? He had been so intent he hadn't seen it coming. Fool!

He rolled on, trying at first to judge time by heartbeats that didn't come, then coolly considering other matters. They would be working like mad, Harrison and Connie, up there in the operating room, to bring him round. Where had he made his mistake? Was a subtemporal the wrong approach, even if it had worked on his animals? Should he have attacked through a frontal flap or through the nose after removal of the cartilage and bone in the nasal septum? Too late now. Too late . . .

He shook himself mentally and was amazed as the wheel that he had become wobbled and scraped against the side of the corridor, emitting sparks. Here was a hallucination to end them all! For just a second the lights came back on, blinding him as he sucked oxygen deep into his lungs. That was better! He'd outlive all of those sadistic old dogs with their lolling red tongues; outlive them by hundreds of years in a brave new world . . . God! How dark could it get?

Far down at the end of the tunnel a blue light was flashing, now, like a beacon. He approached it at increasing speed. Down. Down. How many miles? They had better hurry. Although it didn't really matter too much, he admitted. Connie? Yes, he would have liked to solve that sweet mystery. She was the only one of the whole lot worth spitting at. But she would carry on without him; She wouldn't quit. Not until the gift of something resembling immortality was presented to a race that might never prove worthy of it . . . that never *could* prove worthy of it with a life span of a paltry 90 years.

Not bad, that thought!

His last?

He pondered the matter as the wheel rolled on toward the light.

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